Three Pillars of Skepticism in Classical India

Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa

ETHAN MILLS

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my mother, Linda S. Mills (1949–2000), who encouraged the love of reading and learning that got me this far. In addition to teaching me the importance of laughter and ice cream breaks, she used to say something that I only recently realized has been influencing my philosophical development all along: it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're a good person.

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Ethan Mills

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Preface

Sometime during my childhood I came to suspect that many people around me professed to believe things they had no business believing. Many of these pronouncements, of course, concerned areas of perennial disagreement such as politics and religion, but I also noticed this feature with regard to judgments about other people's life choices, fashion sense, or even preferences in food and entertainment. My youthful suspicion wasn't so much that *I* knew any better, but that most people didn't seem to know as well as they thought they did. Eventually I succumbed to the sort of dogmatism that besets most of us in our late teens and early twenties—the age at which we know everything—bolstered by the fact that I had become a philosophy major as an undergraduate at Hamline University (the dogmatism was my own doing, not that of my excellent professors!).

My passion for philosophy led me to graduate school. During my MA program at the University of Hawai'i, my youthful suspicions reawakened and I developed a deep interest in philosophical skepticism. At this point I took skepticism in the contemporary sense to consist of a truth-claim that we lack knowledge in some or all domains, a thesis that seemed to provide a possible explanation for my youthful suspicion that nobody really knows what they're talking about. Maybe I was right after all.

After a brief hiatus—during which I seriously contemplated careers outside of academic philosophy—I began a PhD program at the University of New Mexico. During my first year in New Mexico, I was overcome with the feeling that there was something wrong with me. Aside from the imposter syndrome that assails almost everyone in graduate school, I noticed that most of my professors and fellow graduate students possessed something I did not: a deep conviction that some philosophical positions are correct at the expense of their competitors. I, on the other hand, wasn't even sure about skepticism any more.

At this point I began to study seriously the works of Sextus Empiricus, Nāgārjuna, and Jayarāśi (Śrī Harṣa would come later). Contrary to the vast majority of philosophers, historical and contemporary, for these ancient skeptics the purpose of philosophy was not to support specific theories or truth-claims about philosophical issues, but rather to reach a state of mental coolness

beyond the need or desire to support any philosophical theories. Rather than the kind of anxiety that skepticism often provokes for contemporary philosophers, for the ancient skeptics reaching a state beyond the need to proffer or support a philosophical theory is the route to peace of mind. While my interpretations are controversial (especially with regard to Nāgārjuna who has been provoking controversy for 1,800 years), as I try to show in this book these interpretations make a great deal of sense of both the texts and contexts of these philosophers. They are skeptics, but not in the contemporary sense of one who makes a truth-claim about human knowledge. So in studying these figures I came to see that there was nothing wrong with me as a philosopher. I merely found in philosophy something different than most of my peers.

My skeptical tendencies haven't always made it easy to communicate with my colleagues in the discipline or to navigate the larger social realities of our current age of polarizing dogmatism (although I'd like to think my skeptical inclinations might make me a better teacher). Nor do I entirely agree with the rather radical attitudes about philosophy possessed by these ancient skeptics; as I will argue in the conclusion, I think philosophy has its uses, so I prefer a more mitigated form of skepticism. Nonetheless, the intellectual kinship I feel with these philosophers has been a source of comfort and curiosity, each of which have helped make the slings and arrows of contemporary academic life a bit more bearable, at times even delightful.

I include these personal anecdotes not merely to indulge my authorial inclinations, but to show that the present project is for me both an academic exercise and a deeply personal endeavor. Studying Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa has changed me as a scholar and as a human being. Whether this is for good or for ill it would perhaps be too dogmatic to say! I also think that the three pillars of classical Indian skepticism have something valuable to teach us today about issues such as the human tendency toward dogmatism, the nature of philosophical inquiry, the scope of human knowledge, and the relationship between philosophy and a good life, topics to which I will return in the conclusion.

A note on the cover image: over the course of this project I have come to think of history of philosophy as analogous to archaeology or paleontology. A present-day scholar attempts to recreate the philosophical views, procedures, motivations, or attitudes of people in distant historical and cultural contexts through available fossil evidence—in this case usually textual evidence. Just as fossil evidence always underdetermines the conclusions of archaeologists and paleontologists, so does textual evidence underdetermine the

conclusions of historians of philosophy. We're all doing the best we can with what we've got.

I chose the image of fossil ammonites for the cover, because, just as these fossils represent what were tens of millions of years ago vivacious organisms, I think of the available texts with which I am working as the fossil remains of what were once living philosophies. Yet these fossil remains can inform our own living philosophies today, partly by providing histories of philosophical organisms that are still with us (such as Nāgārjuna's continued influence among Buddhists around the world) but also in providing inspiration and challenges for contemporary philosophers of all genera.

The structure of the ammonite also has a specific relevance for what I am calling skepticism about philosophy. While the shells of ammonites and their distant modern descendants such as nautiluses grow outward from the center, skeptics about philosophy tend to move from their opponents' philosophical concepts spiraling toward the center, demonstrating the ways in which philosophy turns back on itself in a dance of paradoxical self-reference. Much like fossil ammonites, the argumentative structures employed by Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa are both aesthetically beautiful and have much to teach us today.

Acknowledgments

It is a cliché to claim in one's acknowledgements that a book would not have been possible without a great many people; try as I might to take a skeptical attitude toward this cliché, it is hard to deny.

I'd like to thank the excellent professors of Hamline University, the Antioch College Buddhist Studies Program, Macalester College, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and the University of New Mexico who helped point me in the right direction in my undergraduate career and kept me going during my graduate studies, especially Duane Cady, Stephen Kellert, Sam Imbo, Nancy Holland, Derek Heyman, Robert Pryor, Pat Masters, Joy Laine, Arindam Chakrabarti, Vrinda Dalmia, Roy Perrett, Rodney Roberts, John Bussanich, Kelly Becker, and Mary Domski. I am particularly indebted to Richard Hayes and John Taber for being the two pillars of Indian philosophy during my PhD studies at the University of New Mexico.

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I have presented causal ancestors of many of the ideas and interpretations that found their way into this book in a variety of venues: the American Philosophical Association Pacific, Eastern, and Central Division Meetings, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Annual Conferences, the University of Arizona Colloquia Series, the Tennessee Philosophical Association Conferences, and the 2011 and 2016 East-West Philosophers' Conferences. I have been lucky enough to be invited to give presentations at Kennesaw State University, Wofford College, San José State University, the Takshashila Institution Online Seminar series, Hamline University, the 2017 Workshop on Buddhism and Scepticism at the University of Hamburg, and the 2018 Ancient Epistemology Workshop at Vanderbilt University. I am thankful to the scholars I've met in these and other

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I'd like to thank my colleagues in the Philosophy and Religion Department at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga for their support and encouragement: Talia Welsh, Brian Ribeiro, Dennis Plaisted, Irv Resnick, Jonathan Yeager, and Barry Matlock.

I am also grateful to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga for the Faculty Summer Fellowship I received in 2016, which gave me the time I needed to complete the proposal for this book and to begin writing it.

The libraries at the University of New Mexico, the University of Arizona, and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga made my research possible, in their own holdings, inter-library loan services, and in the expertise of their intrepid librarians.

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I thank *Philosophy East and West* for permission to reuse some of the ideas and interpretations from my 2015 article, "Jayarāśi's Delightful Destruction of Epistemology" in chapters 4 and 5 of the present book.

My cats, Elsie and Ruby, were my "research assistants" while working on this manuscript. Sadly we lost Elsie to kidney failure while I was preparing the penultimate draft of this manuscript. She lived a long, fruitful feline life.

I'm grateful to all of my family and friends for accepting and supporting my academic pursuits over the years even if they appear rather strange from the outside (I admit they often appear strange from the inside, too). My dad, Bob Mills, has been especially

encouraging. I'd also like to thank my step mom, Diane, my sister, Itachi, and my Aunt Barb as well as my Uncle Larry and Aunt Connie and cousins Chris, Brian, and Adam. I should also mention my late Aunt Rose and my late Grandmother Dorothy Mills. I've been lucky to have supportive in-laws: Tom and Dianne as well as Chris, Eric, Jen, and Oliver, not to mention excellent nephews and an excellent niece: Mason, Baylor, Casson, and Charlie. Among my oldest friends, I'd like to thank Adam Nicolai, Ryan Holthaus, Jason Formo, Dante Carter, Rena Zuidema Cummings, and many others. Among newer friends, I'd like to thank Cheryl Martin, Joy Denebeim, Janelle Benoit, Erin Wilcox, Phil Simpson, Antonnet Johnson, Al Harahap, Barry Kamrath, Larry Prince, Angela Prince, Sarah Einstein, Dominik Heinrici, and many more.

My sister, Amanda Mills, has been a friend as well as a sibling. Our mom used to say when we were growing up that it was us against the world. While our circles of loved ones have widened as adults (her circle now includes my brother-in-law, Rob, my nephew, Oliver, and my canine niece, Teela), our friendship has continued to make this world better for both of us.

Above all I'm immensely grateful to my wife, Beth Leahy, for being a friend, traveling companion, fellow academic, persistent yet constructive critic, and lover of cats, TV, and pizza. And for a great deal more than I could say. Academic marriages are not always easy, but she has somehow been with me even when it seemed hard to see how it would all work out. I'm glad it did.

These acknowledgments are almost certainly incomplete. As I suggest toward the end of this book, human beings appear to have cognitive limitations that run deeper than we usually acknowledge. I ask that anyone I failed to acknowledge here blame my cognitive limitations rather than any malicious intent.

Abbreviations for Classical Texts

Ak *Abhidharmakośa.* Vasubandhu. 1975. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyaṃ of Vasubandhu*. Edited by P. Pradhan. Introduction by Aruna Haldar. Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute.

Āś *Āgama Śāstra*. Gauḍapāda. 1990. In *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and the Āgama Śāstra: An Investigation into the Meaning of the Vedānta,* edited and translated by Thomas E. Wood, 167–189. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

BṛU *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.* In Olivelle 1996.

ChU *Chāndogya Upaniṣad.* In Olivelle 1996.

DN *Dīgha Nikāya*. 1995. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the* Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

KaṭhU *Kaṭha Upaniṣad.* In Olivelle 1996.

KeU *Kena Upaniṣad.* In Olivelle 1996.

Khaṇḍ *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. Śrī Harṣa. Editions consulted:

1. 1970. *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya of Mahākavi Śrīharṣa.* Ed. Navikānta Jhā. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.
2. 1979. *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya.* Varanasi: Ṣaḍdarśanaprakāśanapratiṣṭhānam.
3. 1986. *The Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya of Shri-Harṣa: An English Translation.* Translated by Ganganatha Jha. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nāgārjuna. Editions consulted:

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Rg Veda.

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Solomon. Edited by Shuchita Mehta. Delhi: Parimal Publications.

Vism *Visuddhimagga*. Buddhaghosa. 1991. *Visuddhimagga. The Path of Purification*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Onalaska, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions.

Vyāv *Vyāvartanī*. Nāgārjuna. Editions consulted:

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Introduction

Classical Indian Skepticism about Philosophy: Expanding the History of Philosophical Skepticism

The thesis of this book is that the classical Indian philosophical tradition contains a tradition of skepticism about philosophy represented most clearly by three figures: Nāgārjuna (c. 150–200 CE), Jayarāśi (c. 770–830 CE), and Śrī Harṣa (c. 1125–1180 CE); understanding this tradition ought to be an important part of our metaphilosophical reflections on the purposes and limits of philosophy today.

Unlike varieties of epistemological skepticism most familiar to philosophers today, which consist of doubts about knowledge in particular domains (the external world, other minds, induction, etc.), skepticism about philosophy is found most clearly in the Western tradition in Hellenistic Pyrrhonian skepticism, which consists of a therapy for those afflicted by the philosophical quest for dogmatic beliefs. In section 0.2, I will say more about the distinction between the type of skepticism generally understood by contemporary philosophers, which I will call epistemological skepticism, and what I am calling skepticism about philosophy.

0.1 Telling the Story of Skepticism in Classical India

The story begins in chapter 1 with a search for the roots of Indian skepticism about philosophy. I argue that such roots can be found at various points in texts such as the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts. In distinguishing the early or ancient period from the classical period of Indian philosophy, I am relying on the following periodization of Indian philosophy provided by Roy Perrett (2016).[1]

1. The Ancient Period (900 BCE–200 CE)
2. The Classical Period (200 CE–1300 CE)
3. The Medieval Period (1300 CE–1800 CE)
4. The Modern Period (1800 CE–present)
   (Perrett 2016, 7)

As I will show, the skeptical roots that grew in the soil of early or ancient Indian philosophy yielded at least three sophisticated developments in the classical tradition in the work of Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa, who, respectively, sit near the beginning, middle, and end of the classical period. Drawing on an image from Eli Franco, in this book I will refer to this trio as the "three pillars" of skepticism in classical India.[2]

Later, I will articulate what it means to consider such a diverse group of figures as a single tradition, especially in light of the fact that doing so runs directly contrary to the model of understanding the Indian tradition in terms of philosophical schools (*darśanas*). As a preliminary matter I can say that my understanding of the tradition of skepticism about philosophy is a deliberate alternative to the traditional historiography of Indian philosophy. While the traditional school model is not without its uses, my argument here attempts to forge a different path that breaks free from the mold of the school model. It is my opinion that the school model has often prevented historians of Indian philosophy from understanding features of the tradition that do not fit into this model, particularly the ways in which philosophers from different schools influence each other and share methods, attitudes, and goals.

The tradition of skepticism about philosophy cuts across the divide between orthodox Brahmanical philosophers and heterodox Buddhists and Cārvākas. It stretches back to the very beginnings of the Indian philosophical tradition and at least near the end of the classical period. Such skeptics employ the form of debate known as *vitaṇḍā* and the argument form called *prasaṅga*, both of which allow them to engage in philosophical debate and criticize their opponents without thereby presenting a counter-thesis. The aim of this book is to tell part of the story of this tradition, a story from which we have much to learn.

0.2 Skepticism about Philosophy versus Epistemological Skepticism

There are two main obstacles to communicating my notion of skepticism about philosophy to a contemporary philosophical

audience: one temporal, the other cultural. I ask that readers keep their minds open to the specific ways in which I am understanding skepticism, because doing so is a necessary condition for understanding the project of this book. Readers who stubbornly insist on conceiving of skepticism in characteristically modern and contemporary senses will gain little from this book; in fact, rethinking such conceptions of skepticism is part of what I take my project to be.

Contemporary philosophers have come to understand skepticism in a particular way that is driven by a history that few contemporary philosophers fully understand. The paradigm example of skepticism continues to be the discussion of dreams in Descartes's *Meditations* (Descartes 1984, 13; AT VII: 19).[3] The basic dream argument for external-world skepticism is as follows:

1. If you have knowledge about the external world, then you must know you are not dreaming.
2. You do *not* know you are not dreaming.
3. Therefore, you do not have knowledge about the external world.

This argument has frequently been scorned or ignored in contemporary continental philosophy (starting with Heidegger[4]), but it continues to be a major focus in contemporary analytic epistemology. For instance, Keith DeRose gives a more schematic version of the argument called the Argument from Ignorance (where "H" is a skeptical hypothesis and "O" is ordinary knowledge of the external world):

1. I don't know that not-H.
2. If I don't know that not-H, then I don't know that O.
3. I don't know that O. (DeRose 1995, 1)

DeRose's characterization allows for other skeptical scenarios including hallucinations, being a brain-in-a-vat, living in a computer simulation, and so forth. There are, however, precious few actual skeptics of this kind to be found in contemporary philosophy.[5] (It is worth remembering that Descartes himself was no skeptic, either.) Instead, "the skeptic" has become a fictional character, and this argument tends to function as a challenge to be analyzed as part of the theoretical project of "answering the skeptic."

While external-world skepticism remains the paradigm case of skepticism in contemporary philosophy, similar forms of skepticism have been directed toward other domains such as other minds, induction, religion, and ethics. What all these forms of contemporary skepticism have in common, however, is their modern pedigree. They are all examples of what I call epistemological skepticism, which tends

to have the following features:

1. The conclusions of arguments in favor of epistemological skepticism are truth-claims about knowledge, particularly whether and to what extent humans possess knowledge in general or in particular domains (the external world, other minds, induction, religious matters, ethics, etc.).
2. Versions of epistemological skepticism are *epistemological* and *theoretical* in that they constitute moves *within* epistemology; their conclusions constitute epistemological theories, or parts of larger theories.
3. Epistemological skepticism is associated with doubt, which tends to be understood as an active mental state that is achieved through skeptical considerations and arguments.
4. Epistemological skepticism can be methodological (e.g., Descartes's use of skepticism for non-skeptical ends), mitigated (e.g., Hume), or radical/unmitigated (e.g., Unger).[6]

These features should not be understood as necessary and sufficient conditions but rather as typical features more in line with a Wittgensteinian family resemblance. Skepticism is many things to many people, but nonetheless the family of epistemological skepticism has certain typical features. It is this family that the vast majority of contemporary Western philosophers think of when they think of skepticism. It is, furthermore, a family that may have long-lost members in the Indian tradition, as I have discussed elsewhere with regard to the Indian philosopher Vasubandhu (Mills 2016b), or perhaps also with regard to the Cārvāka critique of inference or Ratnakīrti's critique of the existence of other minds.[7]

But even within the Western tradition (or at least what contemporary philosophers have retroactively chosen to refer to as "Western"), skepticism was not always understood in this way. Skepticism in its Hellenistic incarnations of Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism differs from modern skepticism in at least three ways. First, there were actual skeptics who adhered to these traditions; such skepticism was not *merely* a theoretical sparring partner or a problem to be overcome, but a real opposition for non-skeptical philosophers such as Stoics, Epicureans, Aristotelians, and Platonists. Second, the target of ancient skeptics is typically belief rather than knowledge; it is doxastic rather than epistemic. Whether Pyrrhonian skepticism is understood according to the "no belief" or "some belief" interpretations, the target of Pyrrhonian skepticism is clearly belief: the point is to reach suspension of judgment (*epochē*), which involves ceasing to form beliefs (at least of a certain kind).[8] Academic skepticism is often understood as closer to modern skepticism in

having a more epistemic focus, although early Academics like Arcesilaus are said to have suspended judgment on everything, which somewhat blurs the line between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism. Still, the later Academic Carneades developed the notion of a "persuasive impression," which could be considered a type of belief, albeit one in which the Academic skeptic has less than full confidence—a persuasive impression is not so much a truth-claim as, to use Cicero's phrase, "something truth-like" (*Academica* 2.66, trans. Brittain 2006, 38).[9] Third, Hellenistic skepticism fits with the typically Hellenistic conception of philosophy as therapeutic or as a way of life in the senses articulated by Martha Nussbaum (1994) and Pierre Hadot (1995). Sextus Empiricus, our primary (but not entirely unproblematic) source for Pyrrhonian skepticism, explicitly says that skepticism is a way of life or persuasion (*agōgē*) (PH 1.25).[10] While Academic skepticism is sometimes understood as less explicitly therapeutic, Cicero feels the need to explain that Academic skeptics are "freer and less constrained" than their dogmatic counterparts (*Academica* 2.8, trans. Brittain 2006, 6).[11]

The story of how skepticism changed from its ancient to modern incarnations within European traditions is far too complex and controversial to enter into here.[12] But change it did. Sifting past the layers of historical debris is required to understand the concept of skepticism about philosophy, specifically how it differs from what most philosophers today believe skepticism to be. We should not anachronistically understand ancient skepticism in modern terms. This temporal obstacle is not easy to overcome, but I ask for readers' patience in recognizing that my understanding of skepticism about philosophy is informed far more by ancient than modern senses of skepticism.

The cultural obstacles are no less daunting. The discipline of philosophy as it exists in contemporary English-speaking countries is extremely Eurocentric. There are few courses available in philosophy departments in Asian, African, Latin American, Islamic, Indigenous, African American, Asian American, or other philosophical traditions, and fewer specialists in these traditions working within philosophy departments. Designations such as "ancient philosophy" or "modern philosophy" are typically assumed to refer exclusively to Greek and Roman or Western European philosophers, respectively.[13] While there are perhaps historical reasons for this disciplinary myopia, for my part I can find no philosophical justification for it; nonetheless, this is not the place to diagnose the Eurocentrism of the discipline.[14]

Because contemporary philosophers are largely unfamiliar with both ancient Hellenistic skepticism and non-Western forms of skepticism, much of what I say in this book is likely to sound strange,

even prima facie wrong. I admit this. I simply ask readers to remain patient and to evaluate my claims with an open mind. I am inspired by a remark from one of the twentieth century's greatest champions of cross-cultural philosophy, B. K. Matilal: "By calling Nāgārjuna a sceptic . . . I have only proposed a probable extension of the application of the term 'scepticism'" (Matilal 1986, 50).[15] My conception of skepticism about philosophy is a cultural expansion of the idea of skepticism in that I seek to incorporate Indian and other traditions into our understanding of skepticism, although from a temporal sense one might even say skepticism about philosophy is a return to something much closer to the original, Hellenistic understanding. On both axes—cultural and temporal—I am asking readers to engage in a substantial reconsideration of what most contemporary philosophers take skepticism to be. Rethinking our cherished conceptual categories is indeed one of the philosophical benefits of engaging in cross-cultural philosophy.

As I use it, "skepticism about philosophy" constitutes a diverse cross-cultural club of philosophers who use philosophical methods against philosophy itself, which distinguishes them from epistemological skeptics as discussed earlier. Skepticism about philosophy is exemplified in Western philosophy most fully by Sextus Empiricus, in China by Zhuangzi, and perhaps in Abrahamic traditions by Al-Ghazali, Maimonides, and Montaigne. The classical Indian tradition contains hints of such skepticism in the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhism, but skepticism about philosophy reached its peak in the three pillars of skepticism in classical India: Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. While from the larger cross-cultural perspective this rather motley crew of skeptics (which includes the three pillars as well as the figures mentioned earlier) are operating within different intellectual contexts and often engage in skepticism for different reasons, I think there is enough similarity in their skeptical attitude about philosophy to warrant gathering them together in a loosely affiliated philosophical coalition.

Since I am claiming that such skeptics are skeptical about philosophy, it is natural to wonder what, exactly, I am claiming they are skeptical about. The difficulty in answering this question comes from the fact that skeptics about philosophy tend to define "philosophy" dialectically based on their opponents' views. Skeptics about philosophy neither need nor desire to put forward a theory about what philosophy really is.

As an example of this parasitic method of defining the target of skepticism about philosophy, consider Sextus Empiricus. Sextus tells us that he relies on the Stoics's idea that philosophy consists of three parts.

> The Stoics and some others say that there are three parts of philosophy—logic, physics, ethics—and they begin their exposition with logic . . . We follow them without holding an opinion on the matter . . . (PH 2.13, trans. Annas and Barnes 2000, 70)

Sextus says that Pyrrhonists don't have their own opinion about what philosophy is for the simple reason that Pyrrhonism is not about putting forward and defending positions on philosophical matters such as the true nature of philosophy; rather, Pyrrhonism is an ability to reach equipollence between opposing views, which leads to suspending judgment and experiencing tranquility (PH 1.8).

Similarly, let me consider the first of the three pillars: Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna is working purely dialectically with metaphysical and epistemological definitions from opponents such as philosophers from the Abhidharma and Nyāya traditions; his ultimate goal is not the elucidation of another philosophical doctrine, but rather the "pacification of conceptual proliferation" (*prapañcopaśama*). Thus, the target of Nāgārjuna's skepticism is defined by his opponents. Likewise, as will become clear in this book, Jayarāśi's targets are Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Buddhism of the Dignāga tradition, and indeed almost all schools of classical Indian philosophy, while Śrī Harṣa's main targets are the realist theories of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā.[16]

Here are some family resemblance features of skepticism about philosophy:

1. Skepticism about philosophy takes philosophy itself as its target with "philosophy" as understood by other philosophers in the skeptic's tradition; this makes such skepticism *dialectical* in that it is usually directed toward specific theories of other philosophers rather than everyday knowledge claims about the external world, induction, and so forth.[17]
2. Skepticism about philosophy does not lead to an epistemological, theoretical conclusion; skeptics about philosophy are not attempting to adduce support for a truth-claim about human knowledge (although some may do so implicitly or, as in the case of some Academic skeptics, with something less than a full truth-claim).
3. Skepticism about philosophy is not a move within epistemology, a theoretical position, or a view about epistemology; rather, it is usually a wholesale refusal of the project of forming conclusions within epistemology and other areas of philosophy.
4. Skepticism about philosophy has little to do with doubt as an active mental state; instead, it constitutes a form of intellectual therapy with the goal of creating a mental coolness wherein one's impulse to

form beliefs (at least about philosophical matters) is dissipated.
5. Skepticism about philosophy is—whether paradoxically or not—primarily cultivated through the use of philosophical arguments, although these arguments do not have as their conclusions truth-claims about philosophical matters.

As with the features of epistemological skepticism, I want to stress that these are not to be understood as necessary and sufficient conditions. While these, like the features of epistemological skepticism, ought to be understood as Wittgensteinian family resemblances, I admit that the family of skepticism about philosophy is a bit larger and more diverse such that we might legitimately wonder whether some (e.g., Carneades or Cicero) are really part of the family; perhaps skepticism about philosophy is more of a diaspora than a family. Much of this diversity stems from the fact that one's motivations for engaging in skepticism about philosophy might differ. As we will see, each of the three pillars—Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa—has his own context and motivations however similar their attitudes about philosophy may be.

Nonetheless, I find enough family resemblances running through each of them (and back to earlier elements within the Indian tradition) that I think it is profitable to understand the history of this form of skepticism. By analogy, imagine three people who start doing logic puzzles on a daily basis: one for fun, the second to sharpen her skills for her job, and another to stave off cognitive effects of aging. One might be tempted to wonder whether they're really doing the same thing, but on the other hand they may be doing exactly the same puzzles and developing the same cognitive skills. Their differences in motivation in no way obscure their similarities in practice. Likewise, skeptics about philosophy may differ in motivation, but we can learn much, I think, from their points of similarity as well.

Skepticism about philosophy is a strange thing, and I will spend some time in this book trying to explain what the pillars' motivations might have been. Perhaps one of the stranger things about skepticism about philosophy is that it is cultivated through the use of philosophical arguments. The use of philosophical arguments to engender skepticism about philosophy is odd to say the least. It would be as if proponents of vegetarianism were to hone their skills as butchers. One could, as many anti-skeptical opponents in various times and cultures have, say that this kind of skepticism is so absurd, buffoonish, self-defeating, or inconsistent that one need not take it seriously at all. Yet I am intrigued by the challenge of making sense of this apparent absurdity and giving an account of why philosophically gifted individuals—as each of the three pillars obviously was—would

engage in such a thing.

As a philosopher, I am intrigued by the idea that such skeptics may be right, or more precisely, that their activities could lead us to entertain a particular metaphilosophical view; perhaps the apparent inability of philosophers in any tradition in the last three thousand years to come to fully compelling answers ought to engender some degree of skepticism about philosophy. Perhaps this skepticism reveals a deep feature about the human condition: we can ask questions that we are apparently unable to answer. Whether this should be seen as defeating or liberating is an issue to which I will return in the conclusion.

I want to stress that readers will understand little of this book if they are unwilling to entertain conceptions of skepticism beyond the typical contemporary sense (what I am calling epistemological skepticism). I expect that this book will fail to convince some readers simply because they will fail to understand that I am encouraging a rethinking of the concept of skepticism rather than shoehorning the three pillars into our contemporary understanding of skepticism. Of course, there are many reasons readers might disagree with my argument, but this to me seems like a particularly bad reason born of temporal and cultural myopia rather than philosophical or philological considerations. It's as if one were to claim that Plato can't be an idealist solely for the reason that he's not a Berkeleyan idealist.

It is my hope that specialists in Indian and other non-Western traditions will soon move beyond the need to ask comparative questions such as, "Are Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa epistemological skeptics in the contemporary Western sense?" When we let these philosophers speak for themselves, I think we will hear that they are skeptics in an older, more interesting sense, one that has more in common with ancient Hellenistic skepticism but which is nonetheless a unique and worthwhile expansion of our understanding of skepticism. Readers with the intellectual flexibility and humility to realize that they may not know everything that skepticism has been and could be will find much of interest in the following pages whether they ultimately agree with my thesis or not.

0.3 The Scope of This Study and Preview of Contents

In chapter 1, I begin with the roots of Indian skepticism in the earliest strata of the Indian tradition in the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts. I argue that the Ṛg *Veda* contains some expressions of a generally skeptical outlook and even some hints of the type of

argument taken up by the three pillars much later, one that appeals to unwanted consequences (*prasaṅga*) of the opponent's view. I next point to the development of what I call *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, the negative side of which calls into question whether ultimate matters can be known via philosophical means. Lastly, I consider the evidence in early Buddhist texts for both non-Buddhist and Buddhist forms of skepticism: materialism, Sañjayan eel-wriggling, and early Buddhist quietism.

After uncovering these skeptical roots, I turn to the core of the book with two chapters on each of the three major figures: one chapter giving each philosopher's overall aims and methods and a second demonstrating how each philosopher applies these methods to specific philosophical issues within the texts. In chapters 2 and 3, I argue that the Indian Buddhist Nāgārjuna (c. 150–200 CE) should be interpreted as a skeptic about philosophy who presents a unique development of early Buddhist quietism. This skepticism operates in two phases: one in which Nāgārjuna defends a thesis of emptiness and a second in which he demonstrates that this thesis undermines itself along with all other views. By delving into his criticisms of Abhidharma and Nyāya views in epistemology and metaphysics, I show that Nāgārjuna's arguments ought to be seen in quietist skeptical terms that are, while innovative, wholly within Buddhist parameters given the history of Buddhist quietism and Buddhist attitudes toward attachment to belief.

In chapters 4 and 5, I turn to the irreligious Cārvāka skeptic Jayarāśi (c. 770–830 CE). He, too, can be understood as a skeptic about philosophy with the goal of the destruction of all philosophical principles, with a special focus on epistemology, which had, given the tremendous impact of Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE), become the major focus in the philosophy of his day. While Jayarāśi's targets are most of the philosophical schools of his day, I focus on his arguments against the Buddhist epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660 CE). I argue that Jayarāśi should be seen as developing the materialist and Sañjayan strands of early Indian skepticism in his desire to destroy the philosophical bases of his religious opponents, which in turn makes room for the enjoyment of everyday life. This attitude is best summarized by Jayarāśi himself: "When, in this way, the principles are entirely destroyed, all everyday practices are made delightful, because they are not deliberated" (*Tattvopaplavasiṃha* 14.5).[18]

In chapters 6 and 7, I take up the last of the three pillars: the Advaita Vedāntin Śrī Harṣa. Śrī Harṣa applies the skeptical methods found in Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi to create a sophisticated

development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, focusing almost exclusively on the negative side of this type of skepticism. I look at his arguments against the realist schools of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā, particularly his arguments against the realists' insistence that entering into a philosophical debate commits one to the existence of the means of knowledge as well as his arguments against the realist notion of existence (*sattā* or *tattva*). By uprooting the foundations of realism, Śrī Harṣa intends to open up the *possibility* of mystical, non-dual knowledge of *brahman*, although he is far too subtle—and skeptical—a thinker to argue directly in favor of this type of experience.

In the conclusion of this book, I consider what we might learn from the three pillars in our metaphilosophical considerations today. I argue that the history of Indian skepticism detailed here should be seen as evidence for a form of mitigated skepticism about philosophy. While philosophy has its uses, I strongly suspect that the history of philosophy—as exemplified by the three pillars—gives reasons to be modest in our philosophical aspirations.

One issue that lies outside the scope of this book is the historical question of whether interactions between the Greek and Indian worlds in the latter part of the first millennium BCE explain the similarities between Pyrrhonian skepticism and some forms of Buddhism.[19] For instance, Diogenes Laertius reports that Pyrrho traveled in Alexander's entourage to India where he met with "gymnosophists."[20] While these issues are intriguing, nothing in this book rests on resolving these historical questions. Similarities between Pyrrhonism and Indian skepticism might be explained by historical interaction, sheer coincidence, or a kind of "convergent evolution" in which, just as eyesight has evolved along different branches of the phylogenetic tree, two traditions might develop similar ideas from unconnected sources in response to similar philosophical pressures. This is not something I attempt to resolve here, although if I am right that some seeds of skepticism about philosophy can be found as early as the Ṛg *Veda*, then Greek influence would not be required to account for the origin of Indian skepticism, although of course it may well have influenced its direction of development later. Nonetheless, in as much as nothing I am claiming hinges on resolving questions of historical influence, I shall—appropriately enough—suspend judgment about this issue.

0.4 Expanding the History of Philosophy

This project is situated within a larger project that I call expanding the history of philosophy. Just as the history of Western philosophy can illuminate contemporary philosophical activities, so can contemporary

philosophical pursuits be served by expanding the history of philosophy to include classical India.

I in no way mean to denigrate a traditional comparative approach of the kind championed by B. K. Matilal, whose comparisons between classical Indian and contemporary analytic philosophers remain influential today and perhaps did more than any other work in the late twentieth century to make the study of Indian philosophy visible outside the narrow realm of experts.[21] Nor do I intend to denigrate the excellent work of scholars who take a close textual approach inspired by the European, especially German, tradition of Indology. I see my approach of expanding the history of philosophy as a middle way between these approaches, with one foot in each. Paying close attention to historical context need not rule out comparisons with contemporary thought or thinking deeply about what we can learn from this history. In fact, a point from Matilal himself is one of my inspirations.

> "Comparative philosophy" in this minimal sense may be seen as falling within the discipline of the history of philosophy in the global sense. Since it has already been argued that the history of philosophy is philosophy primarily, the above task should also fall within the general discipline of philosophy. (Matilal 2002, 356)

To give one example, consider the similarities between a Plato scholar and a Dharmakīrti scholar. Both read difficult ancient languages, encounter ways of thought that are temporally and culturally distant, and work with texts that are rich enough to allow for multiple plausible interpretations. Each scholar might benefit from comparisons with contemporary or historical figures. Such an approach has been suggested by Gary Hatfield, a historian of early modern European philosophy; Hatfield argues in favor of "contextual history," which both invites contemporary comparisons and takes historical context seriously (Hatfield 2005, 101–106). Furthermore, prominent historians of ancient Greek philosophy like Martha Nussbaum, Julia Annas, and Pierre Hadot are interesting philosophers, not *despite*, but rather *because* of their historical interests.

The work of Amber Carpenter (e.g., Carpenter 2014) is an example of expanding the history of philosophy, particularly in so far as she employs methods similar to those used in the study of ancient Greek philosophy to Indian Buddhist philosophy. I am consciously moving my own work, including the present study, in a similar direction. Like all history of philosophy, projects in the history of Indian philosophy should be thought of as philosophy per se insofar as they may provide

new insights regarding our contemporary concerns, often by juxtaposing contemporary assumptions and understandings with ancient ones.[22] Furthermore, expanding the history of philosophy may encourage intellectual connections between the study of classical India and the study of various periods of Western philosophy as well as Islamic philosophy, Latin American philosophy, African philosophy, East Asian philosophy, and others.

My broad cross-cultural category of skepticism about philosophy is meant to embody the expansion of the history of philosophy. I do not think simply making historical comparisons is enough; indeed, I think it is time to move beyond projects that try to assimilate a non-Western philosopher into Western categories. For instance, it makes little sense to think of Nāgārjuna purely in the terms of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Nāgārjuna can be favorably compared to Sextus on a number of points (as I argue), but he is also working within distinctively Indian Buddhist parameters (as I also argue). We ought to give up comparative approaches that seek to make a philosopher from one tradition fit into the Procrustean bed of a philosopher from a different tradition (usually, of course, this involves making a non-Western philosopher fit the mold of a Western philosopher). I am attempting to do something different. I am looking at the history of global philosophy and attempting to form a broad cross-cultural category that does not take any single tradition as its central paradigm.

So I humbly implore readers to prepare for this book by bearing in mind the following: when I say that there is a tradition of skepticism about philosophy in classical India, I do not mean to say that this tradition can be subsumed as part of the Pyrrhonian tradition; nor am I using the word "skepticism" in the ways it is typically understood by contemporary philosophers. Rather, I mean to say that Sextus Empiricus is merely one among many members of a cross-cultural group that includes Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. One of the benefits of thinking about cross-cultural philosophy in this way is that it opens up the space for engaging in, say, Nāgārjunian readings of Sextus or Jayarāśian readings of Zhuangzi, projects that may shed new philosophical light on historical figures. Another benefit is that this sort of project works against the Eurocentrism of the discipline of philosophy by casting Western philosophy as one among many areas of study rather than *the* central paradigm of all philosophy scholarship.

Few professional philosophers these days doubt that Hellenistic philosophy is worthy of serious study; there is especially a great deal of current interest in Stoicism, both among scholars and the general public.[23] A future in which the study of classical Indian philosophy occupies a similar place as a respectable historical interest is a modest

and attainable goal, one to which I hope this book will contribute.[24] In particular, I hope this book will be of interest not only to my fellow specialists in classical Indian philosophy but also to philosophers with historical or contemporary interests in skepticism and general readers curious to learn from some of the deepest ponderings of human beings in any tradition about the uses and abuses of philosophy, particularly with regard to whether and to what extent philosophy might help us live better lives.

So let us begin to expand the history of philosophy by looking to some of the first stirrings of philosophical thought in India, or for that matter, anywhere else.

NOTES

1. Perrett's is not, of course, the only way to carve up the history of Indian philosophy. See Franco (2013) for an anthology on issues concerning periodization of Indian philosophy.

2. "From almost complete oblivion he [Jayarāśi] slowly emerges as one of the three pillars on which Indian scepticism rests, the other two being the much more famous Nāgārjuna and Śrīharṣa" (Franco 1994, 13).

3. Descartes gives a truncated version of the dream argument in the *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1985, 127; AT VI: 32).

4. Heidegger argues that external-world skepticism represents an inadequate understanding of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962, 244–256).

5. One notable exception is Peter Unger (1975), one of the few contemporary epistemologists to have argued in favor of skepticism (although even he changed his mind later in his career).

6. My understanding of the features of epistemological skepticism has benefitted from Fogelin (1985, 5–7) and Garrett (2004, 69–73).

7. A version of the Cārvāka critique of inference, which perhaps shares similarities with Hume's problem of induction, can be found in Mādhava's *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, Ch. 1 (Mādhava 1977; see also Gokhale 2015). Something like the problem of other minds seems to be at stake in Dharmakīrti's *Saṅtānāntarasiddhi* and Ratnakīrti's *Saṅtānāntaradūṣaṇa* (Wood 1991; see also Dunne 2004 and McDermott 1969).

8. For more on the controversy about whether Pyrrhonians suspend judgment about all beliefs or merely some beliefs, see Vogt (2012), Thorsrud (2009), and Burnyeat and Frede (1997).

9. The interpretation of Academic skepticism is complex and controversial, particularly on how it differs from Pyrrhonism (see Striker 2010 for a nice summary of the issues at stake).

10. Sextus is somewhat problematic in being so late in the tradition; many scholars also question whether he fully understands the original skepticism of Pyrrho (see Thorsrud 2009, Ch. 7).

11. My understanding of Hellenistic skepticism owes much to sources such as Thorsrud (2009), Hankinson (1995), Williams (1988), and Annas and Barnes (1985).

12. The change perhaps took place during the medieval period in European and Islamic philosophy when skepticism came to be seen a theoretical challenge for professional university philosophers, which may have been due to the influence of Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (see Lagerlund 2010 and Augustine 1995). There were few actual skeptics in the medieval European and Islamic world, although figures such as Al-Ghazali and Maimonides are perhaps notable exceptions if they are considered to be skeptics about philosophy. For more on the European appropriation of Hellenistic skepticism in Renaissance and early modern figures such as Montaigne and Descartes, see Popkin (2003), Hartle (2005), Floridi (2010), and Williams (2010).

13. This is despite the 1992 adoption by the American Philosophical Association of a "Statement on the Global Character of Philosophy," which asks philosophers to end such practices. See: http://www.apaonline.org/page/character.

14. A recent attempt at a historical diagnosis is Park (2013). Charles Mills (1997) has argued that racism was at the root of early modern European political philosophy. Defenses of non-Eurocentric conceptions of philosophy are Olberding (2015), Ganeri (2016b), Van Norden (2017), and Mills (2018b). Countering Eurocentrism was also a goal of B. K. Matilal (see Matilal 1986 and Mills 2017).

15. Likewise, "realism" as strictly understood in the West might not entirely fit the resolutely realist Nyāya school. Given the Nyāya slogan "whatever exists is nameable and knowable," Western-trained philosophers might claim that Nyāya is a form of verificationism or phenomenalism, yet it makes sense to think of Nyāya as realist in both epistemological and metaphysical senses given their confidence in our ability to know a mind-independent world. Some expansion and altering of philosophical categories is inevitable in cross-cultural philosophy, but also, I argue, part of the point. We should expand our concepts if we are to do history of *philosophy* and not merely history of Western philosophy, history of Indian philosophy, history of Chinese philosophy, and so forth.

16. One might wonder if I, as an interpreter or historian of philosophy, should offer some account of the general features of the target of skepticism about philosophy, even if such skeptics themselves would be unwilling to do so. If I were to do so, I might say that the target is the attempt at something like a complete account or ultimate justification for things like knowledge, reality, morality, and so forth, or particular subsets of these categories such as knowledge of the external world or the reality of universals. A famous—albeit still vague—formulation comes from Wilfrid Sellars: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars 1962, 35). Thus, skeptics about philosophy could be seen—at least in some imaginary conversation with Sellars—as enacting a therapy that seeks to undermine the compulsion toward attempts to achieve Sellars's aim. The dialectical nature of ancient skepticism about philosophy militates against such broad statements (this is why I had to imagine them in conversation with Sellars), but I will return to something like this in the conclusion of this book in my own attempts to articulate what I think we can learn from the three pillars today.

17. As with my articulation of the features of epistemological skepticism, I have benefitted from clarifications from Garrett (2004) and Fogelin (1985). Additionally, I have been inspired by Robert Fogelin's claim that Pyrrhonism "uses self-refuting philosophical arguments, taking philosophy as its target" (Fogelin 1994, 3).

18. This is my own translation.

19. For those scholars who do think there was historical influence, there is some

disagreement about whether the direction of influence was primarily from India to Greece or *vice versa*. Flintoff (1980) argues that Pyrrho was directly influenced by Buddhist philosophy, making the direction of influence India to Greece. McEvilley (2002, Ch. 18) argues in favor of a complex interaction in which India influenced Greece several centuries before Pyrrho's lifetime; according to McEvilley when Pyrrho brought his ideas to India, he then influenced the subsequent development of Buddhism, particularly Madhyamaka. Kuzminski (2008, Ch. 2) agrees with Flintoff on the direction of influence and opposes McEvilley's view. Beckwith (2015) argues that the primary influence was from India (or central Asia) to Greece such that Pyrrho's system is based on an early, pre-canonical, form of Buddhism. Halkias (2014) agrees that there was influence from India to Greece, but he also discusses the formation of a Hellenic Buddhist culture in northwestern India that was neither wholly Indian nor wholly Greek.

20. See Diogenes Laertius 9.61 (Inwood and Gerson 1997, 285).

21. See, for instance, Matilal (1986, 1998, 2002). For a more recent take on Matilal's approach, which I have called "the Matilal strategy," see Mills (2017).

22. On the comparative side of expanding the history of philosophy, I think we have much to learn from comparisons between Hellenistic and classical Indian philosophy. In addition to the types of comparisons found in this book (e.g., between Sextus and Nāgārjuna), there are perhaps other fruitful comparisons to be made. Hadot's claim that Hellenistic philosophers considered philosophy to be a way of life has a lot in common, for instance, with the *Nyāya Sūtra*'s articulation of the importance of philosophy for one's pursuit of the highest good (e.g., Ganeri 2010). And we might reevaluate the typical view of Cārvāka hedonism through a comparison with Epicureanism. Another type of comparative project might be inspired by John Taber's notion of "transformative philosophy," which he applies to Śaṅkara, Fichte, and Heidegger (Taber 1983).

23. See the popular blog *Stoicism Today* (http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/), which promotes "Stoic Week," wherein participants engage in Stoic exercises a few times a day for a week in order to observe whether they benefit in some way.

24. Alex Watson has a similar thought: "It is my hope—and there are some signs that it is not an unrealistic one—that Indian philosophy will soon begin a similar trajectory to that taken by Greek philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century, when it moved from being restricted to Classics syllabi to becoming a mandatory part of every philosophy degree" (Watson 2015).

Chapter 1

Skeptical Roots in Early Indian Philosophy

Ṛg Veda, Upaniṣads, and Early Buddhist Texts

Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after this world's creation:
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?

—Ṛg Veda *10.129*

The argument of this book is that there is a tradition of skepticism that begins in the earliest strata of the Indian tradition and is later exemplified by Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. The purpose of this chapter is to locate the roots of this skeptical tradition in the *Ṛg Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts, which will serve as the prehistory of the three major figures discussed later. I argue that the seeds of skepticism about philosophy can be found in the earliest texts of the Indian philosophical tradition, in particular in the *Ṛg Veda* as well as in several *Upaniṣads* and early Buddhist texts. These constitute some of the major texts within the early or ancient period of Indian philosophy (c. 900 BCE–200 CE).[1]

This will demonstrate that the type of skepticism that received sophisticated development in the beginning (Nāgārjuna), middle (Jayarāśi), and end (Śrī Harṣa) of the classical tradition (c. 200 CE–c. 1300 CE) was a development of similar ideas found hundreds of years earlier. More specifically, my claim is that after the notion that philosophical speculation might turn on itself was developed in the early tradition, Nāgārjuna most strongly developed early Buddhist quietism, Jayarāśi most distinctly developed the materialist and Sañjayan strains, and Śrī Harṣa most clearly developed *Upaniṣadic*

mystical skepticism. The specific shape of this tradition of skepticism will become clear in future chapters.

This represents an alternative historiography of Indian philosophy according to which traditions can be distinguished by philosophical methods and psychological goals rather than the traditional school model, which is based on explicitly articulated beliefs and religious praxis. Thus, in the last section of this chapter I argue that it is possible to uncover a coherent history of skepticism about philosophy in classical India by drawing together figures that are typically considered to be members of competing schools. Lastly, I ask readers to keep in mind the distinction between epistemological skepticism and skepticism about philosophy that I drew in the introduction (especially section 0.2), although as we shall see this distinction is a bit fuzzier in the early tradition.

1.1 Digging for Skeptical Roots

Before proceeding to the primary texts, I want to make a few methodological remarks about this chapter.

First of all, what do I mean by "skeptical roots"? I certainly do not mean that the skeptical methods and arguments of Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa—the three pillars—can be found in their full and complete forms in the early texts. Instead, what we find are more like previews or inchoate first attempts at these later strategies, which only makes sense given the fact that the early texts generally lack the argumentative rigor of the later classical tradition. While some might doubt that the early texts ought to be properly thought of as philosophy at all given their relative lack of theoretical sophistication, I think they represent early attempts at philosophy akin to ancient Greek pre-Socratics like Thales or Heraclitus. I have chosen the metaphor of roots deliberately: what I am claiming to uncover in this chapter are the roots that later grew into the fully flowering trees of skepticism about philosophy. To continue with this metaphor a bit, these are the trees from which the three pillars of Indian skepticism are constructed. This chapter goes back to the roots of such skepticism.

Some readers might feel that I am cherry-picking examples of skeptical-sounding passages and claiming that these are more representative of their respective texts than is actually the case, somewhat like reading Book One of Plato's *Republic* and claiming that Plato agrees with Thrasymachus's view of justice. I am not, however, claiming that because the Ṛg *Veda* contains skeptical elements that the

general thrust of the text is a kind of skepticism. The Ṛg *Veda* is an incredibly complex text that contains multitudes of philosophical views (along with riddles, hymns, spells, etc.). To reduce such a complex text to *any* one particular view is misguided. Much the same could be said for the *Upaniṣads* and early Buddhist texts, both of which contain numerous (often competing) strands of philosophical views and attitudes. My point rather is that these texts, representing the earliest strata of the Indian philosophical tradition, contain elements of skepticism, elements that can be found exemplified again much later in the tradition.

Another objection might be that I am bending over backward a bit to make the case that these earlier texts contain the same elements as texts written in different cultural and philosophical contexts or that in doing so I am blurring the distinction I was so intent on drawing in the introduction between epistemological skepticism and skepticism about philosophy. But again my point is not that exactly the same kinds of skepticism are to be found in the earlier texts; early Buddhist quietism, for instance, may be compatible with some kind of "higher knowledge" in a way that I argue Nāgārjuna's skepticism is not, and some instances of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism may be a great deal closer to epistemological skepticism than Śrī Harṣa's later development of this stance. My goal is to show how these earlier texts contained ideas and expressions of attitudes that were later developed in novel, more systematic ways by the later pillars of Indian skepticism. While Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa were innovative, creative philosophers, they were all working with preexisting material, which they fashioned into something new. As I will argue in section 1.5, this is why I think it makes sense to speak of a skeptical tradition in classical India, or perhaps more accurately, a cluster of traditions.

1.2 Skepticism in the Ṛg *Veda*: The Shadow of Philosophical Inquiry

The Sanskrit word *veda* literally means "knowledge." Skepticism, in its usual philosophical sense, is a denial of knowledge in some or all domains. Thus, it may initially seem strange to look for skepticism in the Ṛg *Veda*, but that is just what I shall do in this section.

The Ṛg *Veda*, a collection of hymns, riddles, poems, spells, ritual instructions, and philosophical speculation, is generally considered to be the oldest Sanskrit text. Recent scholarship often dates it to somewhere between 1400 and 1000 BCE.[2] While the Ṛg *Veda* is undoubtedly worth understanding as a great work of literature, as a

source of religious inspiration, and as a valuable historical record of the beginnings of the Sanskrit language as well as Brahmanical religious traditions, my concern is to understand the Ṛg *Veda* as the earliest evidence of philosophical thinking in India. My contention is that the text contains hints of a non-dogmatic attitude as well as what I am calling skepticism about philosophy—it is simultaneously the beginning of philosophy in India and the beginning of skepticism about philosophy. As B. K. Matilal puts it, Vedic questioning "shows that scepticism is as old as the birth of civilization" (Matilal 1977, 33).[3]

There is nothing new about the idea that there are skeptical elements to be found in the Ṛg *Veda*. Radhakrishnan and Moore's influential *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, originally published in 1959, contains a section in their chapter on the Vedas called "Skepticism and Ridicule of the Gods." This section mentions Ṛg *Veda* 10.121 and 10.129 and quotes excerpts from Ṛg *Veda* 8.89, 4.24, 2.12, 1.164, 9.112, 10.86, 7.113, and 10.151 (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1989, 34–36).

In his 1965 collection of early Indian philosophy, Franklin Edgerton claimed:

> In the fifth verse of RV 2.12, a henotheistic hymn to the war-god Indra, there is a startling reference to religious scepticism. Some people, it says, asked about Indra, 'Where is he?', and even dared to say, 'He is not at all! Of course the pious author rejects this view; the fact that he refers to it may be significant. Without going so far as the sceptics, and still keeping within the orthodox ritualistic sphere, some advanced thinkers went beyond henotheism" toward a sort of "tentative monotheism." (Edgerton 1965, 19)

Edgerton is perhaps stretching things a bit to find the seeds of monotheism and *Upaniṣadic* monism in the Ṛg *Veda*, but he is correct that a striving for knowledge of the fundamental nature of reality is driving many of the Vedic poets. The corollary to this striving—the shadow of it one might say—is a kind of skepticism about the fruitfulness of this desire for fundamental knowledge. If the Ṛg *Veda* can be said to contain the seeds of later Indian attempts at philosophical understanding, so can it be said to contain the seeds of the sorts of skepticism about these attempts that can be found in the later tradition.

One striking fact about the Ṛg *Veda* is that it is generally longer on occasionally inchoate speculation than systematic philosophical

answers. In her commentary on RV 10.72, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty notes, "It is evident from the tone of the very first verse that the power regards creation as a mysterious subject, and a desperate series of eclectic hypotheses (perhaps quoted from various sources) tumbles out right away" (Doniger O'Flaherty 1981, 37–38). This lack of systematicity is of course partly explained by the fact that attempts at philosophical speculation in India were in their infancy; Vedic poets simply did not have the conceptual tools available to their successors.

There are also hints, however, that a kind of skepticism about the efficacy of this speculation was also at play: not only were the Vedic poets new to philosophy, they were occasionally aware of the possibility that this inquiry could be turned on itself, often resulting in a non-dogmatic attitude. As Bina Gupta puts it,

> What is remarkable about these texts is that they do not end with a definite answer; they raise many more questions, and at times end with such agnostic conclusion as 'who knows, perhaps, not one, not even the *devas*.' They move beyond a wonderful poetic response to nature and an inquisitive mind that asks questions without being committed to any dogmatic answer. We find on the one hand, first-rate poetry and on the other, the beginnings of human questionings about the truth of the world around us. If, as Heidegger often remarked, original thinking is poetic and that 'thinking' (*Denken*) is also 'thanking' (*Danken*), then the Vedic hymns show the emergence of that original thinking, not yet frozen into conceptual abstractions. (Gupta 2012, 25)

More specific expressions of skepticism about philosophy can be found in passages such as RV 2.12, 8.89, 9.112, 10.82, and 10.129.[4] RV 2.12 contains a passage that gives evidence of skepticism about what the Vedic poets have said about the god Indra: "The terrible one, of whom they ask, Where is he? And they even say of him, He is not at all" (Trans. Edgerton 1965, 53). While this is more properly a kind of skepticism about specifically theological statements, it could be seen as a precursor to or cousin of skepticism about philosophy more generally: just as one might doubt specifically theological statements, so might one doubt philosophical statements more generally.[5]

For example, RV 10.82 casts doubt on philosophical views concerning creation; even if one were to know *that* a creator exists, this does not guarantee knowledge of creation itself, not even for learned Brahmin priests (i.e., "those who recite the hymns").

> You cannot find him who created these creatures; another has come between you. Those who recite the hymns are glutted with

> the pleasures of life; they wander about wrapped up in mist and stammering nonsense. (Trans. Doniger O'Flaherty 1981, 36)

Other possible satires of the pretensions of Brahmins can be found at RV 7.103, which compares (at least some) Brahmins to croaking frogs, and RV 9.112, which somewhat playfully claims that humans and animals of all persuasions and professions, including Brahmins, are—despite our pretentions otherwise—seeking wealth above all.

The clearest expression of skepticism about philosophy, however, is found in one of the most famous parts of the text: the hymn to creation (*nāsadiya*) in RV 10.129. After a description of the evolution of creation out of a mysterious state in which there was neither existence nor nonexistence (verses 1–5), the hymn ends on a decidedly skeptical note.

> 6. Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it—from where was it born, from where was this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?
>
> 7. This creation—from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not—he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows. Or if he does not know … ? (Trans. Jamison and Brereton 2014, 1609)

This conclusion can be taken as an expression of epistemological skepticism about cosmological questions (e.g., Koller 1977) or perhaps as a way of "repeating the fundamental act of creation, the act of thinking" (Jamison and Brereton 2014, 1608).[6]

I suggest reading it as akin to the types of sophisticated *prasaṅga* arguments to be found much later in Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi. The poet shows that this particular cosmological view cannot be known by its own lights; for, if this view is correct that the gods themselves are products of creation and that any "overseer" (if indeed there is one) is forever beyond our ken, then we can never knowledgably assert the view itself. This is not so much a general epistemological argument against any cosmological view as Koller and others have taken it; it is an argument showing that this cosmological view—perhaps like views of the Brahmins ridiculed elsewhere—is undone by its own pretentions.

My claim is not that the Vedic poets had a critique of philosophy quite so elaborate or complete as those I will claim for Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa in future chapters. Philosophy itself was just beginning; Vedic poets had after all far less to work with in the way philosophical targets. Nonetheless, I find it intriguing that the Indian

philosophical tradition contained, from its very beginnings, the seeds of an internal critique. The Vedic poets had discovered ways in which philosophical probings turn back on themselves. They had discovered in the swirling wellsprings of the Indian tradition the murmurs of skepticism about philosophy.

1.3 *Upaniṣadic* Mystical Skepticism: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Kaṭha,* and *Kena Upaniṣads*

The prospects for skeptical elements in the *Upaniṣads* may seem more fraught than those for the Ṛg *Veda*. Especially in light of Vedāntic interpretations, the *Upaniṣads* are typically read as exhorting readers to achieve a special sort of knowledge of the self (*ātman*) and ultimate reality (*brahman*).

I am not disputing that many *Upaniṣads* focus on a kind of knowledge, which I will call mystical knowledge; such knowledge is based on experiences that, following criteria from William James (1958), can be characterized as being ineffable and having a noetic quality (i.e., constituting a special state of knowledge). My focus in this section shall be on several passages in the *Upaniṣads* that point to the limitations of various sorts of knowledge, including those most characteristically associated with philosophical activity: sensory perception, reasoning, linguistic conceptualization, analysis, and so forth. In other words, there can be found in some parts of the *Upaniṣads* a kind of mysticism combined with a kind of skepticism about philosophy. I call this *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.[7]

According to Paul Deussen, there are both negative and positive aspects to be found in *Upaniṣadic* reflections on knowledge: "It was negative in so far as no experimental knowledge led to a knowledge of Brahman; and it was positive in so far as the consciousness was aroused that the knowledge of empirical reality was an actual hindrance to the knowledge of Brahman" (Deussen 1966, 74). Drawing on Deussen's distinction, I characterize *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism as constituted by both positive and negative parts:

1. There is mystical knowledge of *ātman/brahman*.
2. This mystical knowledge cannot be gained through the senses or through philosophical means such as reasoning, analysis, linguistic conceptualization, and so forth.

While classical Vedānta traditions as well as contemporary scholars have tended to focus on the positive side of this characterization, the

negative, more skeptical side, as I shall demonstrate in chapters 6 and 7, was thoroughly developed later in the Indian tradition in the work of Śrī Harṣa.

The *Upaniṣads* are typically taken to be part of the Vedic corpus in the larger sense, although they are later than the Ṛg *Veda*. It is generally accepted that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* are probably the oldest, dating from around the seventh or sixth centuries BCE; *Upaniṣadic* texts continued to be composed for centuries, perhaps even as late as the sixteenth century CE (Olivelle 1996, xxxiii–xxxvi), although the older *Upaniṣads* continue to have the greatest importance.[8] While there is some scholarly dissent on this matter, particularly in the work of Johannes Bronkhorst, most scholars consider the earliest *Upaniṣads* to have been composed before the beginning of Buddhism, with Buddhism as an explicit reaction to many *Upaniṣadic* ideas.[9]

Perhaps due to an influence from Neo-Vedānta and other intellectual trends aimed at synthesizing diverse materials into collections of essential ideas, it was once fashionable for scholars to write of *the* philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*.[10] However, I share Patrick Olivelle's assessment that careful reading of the texts and their histories reveals a more complex, heterogeneous picture: "Different theologians, philosophers, and pious readers down the centuries both in India and abroad have discovered different truths in them. That has been, after all, the common fate of scriptures in all religions" (Olivelle 1996, xxiv).

For that reason I am not making the claim in what follows that the *Upaniṣads* are fundamentally skeptical texts or that they at root aim to espouse a form of skepticism. Rather, I mean simply to point to moments within several early *Upaniṣads* that contain articulations of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BU), or "Great Forest Text," is perhaps the oldest of the *Upaniṣads*, and it contains several hints of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism. A warning against excessive philosophical conceptualization can be seen when the great sage Yājñavalkya tells Gārgī Vācaknavī, one of a few women philosophers depicted in the BU, that her head will explode because she is asking too many questions (BU 3.6). Elsewhere Yājñavalkya tells another woman philosopher, his wife Maitreyī, that she should know the self (*ātman*) and uses a series of metaphors including this one: "It is like this. When a drum is being beaten, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the drum or the man beating the drum" (BU 2.4.7, trans. Olivelle 1996, 29). He later summarizes his metaphors: "By what means can one perceive him by means of whom one perceives the whole world? Look—by what

means can one perceive the perceiver?" (BU 2.4.14, trans. Olivelle 1996, 30). According to Yājñavalkya, knowledge of the *ātman* is not gained through philosophical conceptualization or through normal perception.

This sentiment is most famously, if somewhat enigmatically, summarized in the Sanskrit phrase "*neti, neti.*" This could be literally translated as "not thus, not thus." It is typically translated as "not, not" or "no, no."[11] Olivelle translates it nicely as "not ------ , not ------" (e.g., BU 3.9.26, trans. Olivelle 1996, 51). The idea seems to be that the self cannot be known by typical means. Perhaps that it cannot be fully articulated in speech or normal conceptualization. Instead, one ought to follow a *via negativa*. Elsewhere a knower of the self is compared to a man embracing his lover, oblivious to everything else, thus indicating that this knowledge is not only distinct as a source of knowledge, but far more valuable as well (BU 4.3.21).

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (CU) contains several important pedagogical scenes, including a particularly famous scene in which Śvetaketu is instructed about the self (*ātman*) by his father, Uddālaka Āruṇi, through a series of analogies. In one analogy Āruṇi has Śvetaketu place salt in water and instructs him to come back later (CU 6.13). When he finds that he can no longer see the salt, Āruṇi asks his son to taste it. When his son tells him it tastes salty, he responds.

> You, of course, did not see it there, son; yet it was always right there. The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (*ātman*). And that's how you are [*tat tvam asi*], Śvetaketu. (CU 6.13.2–3, trans. Olivelle 1996, 155)[12]

The self, like the salt, is there although one does not see it. Presumably one does not taste the self, either! The self is not known by the senses or, by extension, by reasoning that relies on sensory input. How then is the self known? Why are indirect forms of teaching such as analogies so frequently used?

These questions continue to be relevant in another famous scene in Chapter Eight of the CU 8.7–15. Various gods and *asuras* (celestial beings somewhat like demons) come to the god Prajāpati to inquire about the self, thus showing that even most of the gods require instruction on this difficult matter! Prajāpati gives them incorrect but increasingly abstract answers (their reflection, body, the one who dreams, and the dreamless sleeper) while instructing them to live the life of celibate students for thirty-two years before giving the next answer. After ruling out knowledge of the self by the senses or normal routes of consciousness over a period of 101 years (three periods of

thirty-two years and one period of five years), Prajāpati tells his students that the self is the agent of awareness: the one who sees, smells, thinks, and so forth. As he says, "The one who is aware: 'Let me think about this'—that is the self; the mind is his divine faculty of sight. This very self rejoices as it perceives with his mind, with his divine sight, these objects of desire found in the world of *brahman*" (CU 8.12.5, trans. Olivelle 1996, 175).

This indirect method is a paradigm case of what Jonardon Ganeri points to as the purposeful concealment of the self in the *Upaniṣads* (Ganeri 2007, 17–20). While there's something dryly comical about Prajāpati convincing gods and demons to live as his students for decades (they even carry his firewood), there's a serious point here: nobody can be told directly what the self is. It must be discovered for oneself. Even if Prajāpati *could* show or tell his students about the self directly (which of course he could not), it would do no good. Indeed, the final trick in the story is that readers may wonder how final the final answer really is.[13] Knowledge of the self remains deliberately elusive, at least via linguistic and conceptual means; this story hints at a kind of mystical knowledge while embodying the second, skeptical side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

Prominent expressions of this variety of skepticism are also found in the *Kaṭha* and *Kena Upaniṣads*. In the famous discussion between Death and Naciketas in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (KaU), Death tells Naciketas that knowledge of the afterlife is not achievable by reasoning, although it could be known by instruction (KaU 2.9). The self, however, is even more elusive.

> This Self cannot be gained by instruction, not by intellect, not by much holy Learning. Only whom he chooses, by him he is to be gained; this Self chooses that man's person as his own (to dwell in).
>
> Not one who has not ceased from evil action, not one who is not pacified and concentrated, nor yet one of unpacified mentality, could attain him by (the way of) knowledge. (KaU 2.23–24, trans. Edgerton 1965, 185)

Elsewhere there are further articulations of ineffability: "'This is that'—so they think, although/ the highest bliss can't be described" (KaU 5.14, trans. Olivelle 1996, 244). And also: "Not by speech, not by the mind/ not by sight can he be grasped. / How else can that be perceived other than by saying, 'He is!'" (KaU 6.12, trans. Olivelle 1996, 246).

The negative skeptical dimensions of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism are perhaps most clearly articulated in the *Kena Upaniṣad*

(KeU).[14] In KeU 1.3, it is said that knowledge of the self does not come from sight, thinking, or speech:

> Sight does not reach there;
> neither does thinking or speech.
> We don't know, we can't perceive,
> how one would point it out.
>
> (Trans. Olivelle 1996, 227)[15]

Chapter 2 begins with a challenge: "If you think 'I know it well'—perhaps you do know ever so little the visible appearance of *brahman*; there is that part of it you know and there is the part which is among the gods. And so I think what you must do is to reflect on it, on that unknown part of it" (KeU 2.1, trans. Olivelle 1996, 228). What follows is an articulation of what appear to be paradoxical statements about knowledge of *brahman*.

> I do not think / that I know it well;
> But I know not / that I do not know.
> Who of us knows that, / he does know that;
> But he knows not, / that he does not know.
>
> It's envisioned by one who envisions it not; / but one who envisions it knows it not.
> And those who perceive it perceive it not;
> But it's perceived by those who perceive it not.
>
> (KeU 2.2–3, trans. Olivelle 1996, 228).

The first few lines above indicate something like Meno's paradox of inquiry. In Plato's *Meno* (80d-e), a paradox is raised with regard to knowledge of virtue: If one does not know what virtue is, how will one recognize it when one finds it? If one *does* know what virtue is, then is inquiry into it superfluous?[16] KeU 2.2 seems to articulate the first half of Meno's paradox: There are things we do not know that we do not know, so how can we come to know them? Olivelle offers the following explanation:

> The meaning appears to be that we do know the visible appearance of *brahman* in this world. This appears to be the meaning of "Who of us knows that, he does know that." But there is a deeper aspect of *brahman* (the part among the gods?) that is so far beyond human perception that we do not even know that we do not know it. (Olivelle 1996, 373)

So is this knowledge of *brahman* forever beyond our ken? KeU 2.3 gives a seemingly paradoxical answer: *Brahman* is known by those who do not know it. What's going on here?

N. A. Nikam (1948) offers an analysis of the epistemology of the KeU in terms of Russell's theory of types. In this case the object language is seeing, hearing, thinking, and so forth while the *Upaniṣad* is attempting to articulate a metalanguage by which we can explain seeing, hearing, thinking, and so forth. Nikam disagrees with Russell that it is self-contradictory to say, "'there is knowledge not expressible in words, and use words to tell us what this knowledge is'"; according to Nikam the problem is avoided by taking KeU 2.1 to say that words might give partial, non-dogmatic knowledge but not complete knowledge of *brahman* (Nikam 1948, 160). Nikam sees the KeU as articulating a "perfected epistemology" that "exceeds Empiricism and Rationalism by reconciling them; and it has something of Scepticism in it, in so far as its attitude is 'Why *should* I believe this or that?' and not 'Why do I believe this or that?'" (Nikam 1948, 161).

Nikam's analysis fits well with *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, and it offers a possible answer to the paradox of ineffability: how could one say anything about allegedly ineffable knowledge? Perhaps the point of the seeming paradoxes in KeU 2.3 is to rule out certain *kinds* of knowing, envisioning, and perceiving while recognizing that it is in effect attempting to use the object language to articulate what would more properly be articulated in a metalanguage. The problem, then, is that this metalanguage is at the highest level and cannot itself be explained by a yet higher metalanguage; it can merely be indicated in the object language in clumsy, seemingly paradoxical terms. To borrow a metaphor from Zen Buddhism, one might see the language of texts like the KeU as a finger pointing at the moon. This analysis also explains more generally why the language of the positive side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism tends to be vague or downright paradoxical. It is also why, as I will argue in chapters 6 and 7, Śrī Harṣa avoided attempting to give any positive philosophical account of knowledge of *brahman/ātman*, instead opting to develop the negative, skeptical side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism using the tools developed by skeptics like Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi.

To sum up this section, there are articulations within several

Upaniṣads of a variety of mystical skepticism. This type of skepticism contains positive and negative elements: while there is a type of ineffable knowledge of *ātman/brahman*, this mystical knowledge is not sensory, nor can it be achieved through the typical means of philosophy: reasoning, analysis, linguistic conceptualization, and so forth. I should reiterate once again that skepticism about philosophy was not articulated in early Indian philosophy with the degree of sophistication found in the later classical tradition. I am not claiming that such skepticism was found in its full form or even that the early texts are consistently advocating this form of skepticism (in fact, they often waffle between something more like epistemological skepticism, skepticism about philosophy, and attempts to articulate positive knowledge claims). Instead, I see the skeptical elements discussed in this chapter as the roots of what came to be in the classical tradition. While many later commentators, classical and contemporary, have emphasized the positive part of the equation of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, as we shall see in chapters 6 and 7, the twelfth-century Advaitin Śrī Harṣa pursued the negative side to an unparalleled degree. The fruits of Śrī Harṣa's skepticism were cultivated from roots deep within the *Upaniṣads*.

1.4 Materialism, Sañjayan Eel-Wriggling, and Early Buddhist Quietism

Somewhat like the *Upaniṣads*, early Buddhist texts are often read as describing the salvific benefits of a certain kind of knowledge most paradigmatically possessed by the historical Buddha.[17] Yet a closer reading reveals representations of skepticism, sometimes in opposition to a type of Buddhist salvific knowledge but at other times alongside it as an alternative strand within early Buddhism. In particular early Buddhist texts contain valuable historical evidence for the presence of both non-Buddhist and Buddhist forms of skepticism in early Indian philosophy: materialism, Sañjayan eel-wriggling, and early Buddhist quietism.

Materialism is the metaphysical view that there are no incorporeal entities; such a view is often referred to as annihilationism in early Buddhism.[18] This view is not exactly skepticism, but it is a well-represented challenge to religious views within early Buddhist texts. For instance, the teacher Ajita Kesakambalī is represented as saying, "This human being is composed of the four great elements, and when one dies the earth part reverts to earth, the water part to water, the fire part to fire, the air part to air, and the faculties pass away into space" (*Samññaphala Sutta* 23, trans. Walshe 1995, 96). That

everything consists of the four material elements later became a common Cārvāka materialist view mentioned explicitly both by Jayarāśi and in the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, both of which I will discuss in chapter 4.

A more properly skeptical attitude of noncommitment can be found in the so-called "eel-wrigglers" and in the figure of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta. Eel-wrigglers[19] are described in *Brahmajāla Sutta* 2.23: "There are, monks, some ascetics, and Brahmins who are Eel-Wrigglers. When asked about this or that matter, they resort to evasive statements, and they wriggle like eels on four grounds" (Trans. Walshe 1995, 80). The four grounds are that any declaration of a thesis might be a lie, might create harmful emotions, might provoke objections that are difficult to answer, or lastly that the eel-wriggler might simply be stupid (*Brahmajāla Sutta* 2.24–27). The skeptical angle here is that eel-wrigglers refuse, much like Pyrrhonian skeptics, to either assert or deny a thesis.

This attitude is most clearly presented in the figure of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta in *Samaññaphala Sutta* 32.

> Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta said: "If you ask me: 'Is there another world?' if I thought so, I would say so. But I don't think so. I don't say it is so, and I don't say otherwise. I don't say it is not. If you ask: 'Isn't there another world?' . . . 'Both?' . . . 'Neither?' . . . 'Is there fruit and result of good and bad deeds?' 'Isn't there?' . . . 'Both?' . . . 'Neither?' . . . 'Does the Tathāgata exist after death?' 'Does he not?' . . . 'Both? . . . Neither?' . . . I don't not say it is not. (Trans. Walshe 1995, 97)

It's worth nothing that Sañjaya explicitly uses a fourfold negation, or a negative tetralemma/*catuṣkoṭi*, of much the same type later used by Nāgārjuna (as I will discuss in detail in chapter 3). That is, Sañjaya denies four options: that it is, that it is not, that it both is and is not, and that it neither is nor is not. There may also be influences on Jayarāśi in that Sañjaya's *modus operandi* is to set up several options in order to deny each one (e.g., Jayatilleke 1963, 88–89). We see in Sañjaya the roots of the argument form that, as I shall discuss in the next section and in future chapters, eventually came to be a central method for classical Indian skeptics: *prasaṅga* (unwanted consequences).

While materialism and Sañjayan eel-wriggling are represented in early Buddhist texts as dangerous non-Buddhist elements, there are some skeptical elements that are presented in more positive light. I call this attitude early Buddhist quietism.

Steven Collins defines quietism as "an attitude which emphasizes passivity in religious practice, and which seeks to attain as its final goal a state of beatific 'inner quiet'" (Collins 1982, 139).[20] The purpose of cultivating early Buddhist quietism is not the articulation, analysis, and defense of specific knowledge claims, nor is it to aim for liberating insight, as is the case in the dominant tendency in Buddhist thought, which I call the analysis-insight tendency. Rather, early Buddhist quietism aims for the pacification of such tendencies, a state of mental coolness in which a practitioner loses the impulse toward coming to know and defending even Buddhist tenets. Let me be clear that, just as I never claimed that the *Upaniṣads* are essentially skeptical, neither do I intend to claim that early Buddhism is essentially quietist. As I see it, early Buddhist philosophy contained two competing strands. The analysis-insight strand was always the more dominant of the two in terms of representation and influence, but the quietist strand was there from the beginning. Quietism found a strong proponent in Nāgārjuna, who brilliantly combined both strands, pursuing analysis-insight as a means to quietism (or so I will argue in chapters 2 and 3).

I will discuss four specific examples of early Buddhist quietism: the anti-speculative attitude, the elimination of conceptual proliferation (*papañca*), the fact that many arguments against the self have non-dogmatic conclusions, and the goal of relinquishing all views.

Early Buddhism contains several articulations of an anti-speculative attitude, or an unwillingness to engage in what the Buddha and others depict as excessive philosophical speculation beyond experience. The attitude is articulated clearly in the *Cula Māluṅkya Sutta* and the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*.

The *Cula Māluṅkya Sutta* focuses on Māluṅkyaputta, a person who refuses to follow the Buddha unless the Buddha can answer ten questions: two on the eternality of the world, two on the finitude of the world, two on whether the self is identical with the body, and four on whether the Tathāgata (i.e., the Buddha) exists after death (Majjhima Nikāya 1.426–432).[21] Somewhat surprisingly, the Buddha refuses to answer Māluṅkyaputta's questions. To explain his refusal, he employs a famous metaphor: he says that refusing to follow the path to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) because speculative metaphysical questions remain unanswered would be like a person who was struck by a poisoned arrow refusing to have the arrow removed until that person knew the specific personal characteristics of the person who shot the arrow (clan, complexion, village, etc.) or of material composition of the arrow and the bow. Māluṅkyaputta's questions, according to the Buddha, are likewise unnecessary for the path toward the cessation of suffering.

> For what reason are these undeclared by me? Because these are not useful in attaining the goal; they are not fundamental to the religious life and do not lead to aversion, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher knowledge, enlightenment, and *nibbāna*. (Majjhima Nikāya 1.431, trans. Holder 2006, 99)

That is, the types of metaphysical speculation that Māluṅkyaputta wants the Buddha to settle for him are not conducive to the Buddhist path. It's worth noting here that there are precisely the kinds of questions many philosophers consider; even Buddhist philosophers later in the tradition argue for views such as the beginninglessnes of the universe. The Buddha's mention of "higher knowledge" could be a Buddhist equivalent of the positive side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, or it might refer to knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (which the Buddha mentions directly after the passage quoted above). In either case, the Buddha's critique of Māluṅkyaputta is that the speculative questions he is asking—or in the very least the context in which he is asking them—are not helpful and will even impede progress on the Buddhist path.

Similar ideas are found in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* in the metaphors of the water snake and the raft (Majjhima Nikāya 1.130–142). A monk called Ariṭṭha has the heretical view that indulgence in sensory pleasures is not a detriment to a monastic life. The Buddha says that Ariṭṭha's misinterpretation of the teaching is like grasping a dangerous water snake by the tail, which results in being bitten by the snake; likewise Ariṭṭha and others have wrongly grasped the teachings.

> These teachings that have not been examined with intelligence are accepted without comprehension. Instead, they study the *dhamma* [Buddhist teachings] for the purpose of criticizing others and for the purpose of merely quoting; so they do not achieve the good result, for which purpose the *dhamma* ought to be studied. These teachings that are poorly grasped lead to harm and suffering for a long time. What is the reason for this? It is because of the wrong grasp of the teachings. (Majjhima Nikāya 1.134, trans. Holder 2006, 106)

As with the arrow metaphor, the idea here is that the Buddha's teachings are to be understood in terms of their intended purpose: ending suffering. They are not for "criticizing others" or "merely quoting." The water snake metaphor demonstrates that misunderstanding the teachings and their purpose can actually be a dangerous thing. Hundreds of years later, Nāgārjuna appealed to this metaphor in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.11 when he referred to a

misinterpretation of emptiness as being like a snake wrongly grasped.

The Buddha appeals to another famous metaphor immediately after the water snake. He says, "*Bhikkhus* [monks], I will teach you that the *dhamma* is like a raft—for crossing over, not for retaining" (Majjhima Nikāya 1.134, trans. Holder 2006, 107). The Buddha goes on to explain a person who uses a raft to successfully ford a river, but then decides to carry the raft on his head after crossing the river. The Buddha explains, "by understanding the parable of the raft, you should abandon the *dhamma*, all the more what is not the *dhamma"* (Majjhima Nikāya 1.135, trans. Holder 2006, 108). The Buddha is warning his audience about the possibility of becoming attaching to the teaching itself. The teaching is for the purpose of ending suffering, which requires ending harmful attachment. One should not become dogmatically attached to the Buddha or his teachings, a sentiment that I will discuss again in chapter 2 with regard to the famous ending of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (27.30) in which Nāgārjuna says that the purpose of Buddhism is the abandoning of all views.

A second type of example of early Buddhist quietism can be found in passages that say one should aim for the elimination of conceptual proliferation (*papañca*). In the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya 1.108–114), the Buddha says that ending conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) will produce the end of a variety of unwholesome states such as "the propensity to attachment … the propensity to aversion … the propensity to speculative views … the propensity to … quarreling, disputing, contention, accusation, slander, and false speech" (Majjhima Nikāya 1.110, trans. Holder 2006, 75). Later the monk Mahākāccana explains that *papañca* is the result of reasoning, which is in turn based on perception. Thus, conceptual proliferation can be traced to the perceptual act itself, and conversely, the cessation of conceptual proliferation results from the cessation of perception. *Papañca* was later rendered into Sanskrit as *prapañca*, a word that is used by Nāgārjuna several times (for instance, in the dedicatory verse and 25.24 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*). According to Edgerton, "The freedom from prapañca is always praised" and that the word is "closely associated with vikalpa, and the contexts suggest *vain fancy, false imagining*" (Edgerton 2004, 380–381). This is an example of early Buddhist quietism because it proposes that the end of conceptualization and reasoning (at least of a certain kind) is an important goal rather than analysis of or insight into the truth.

A third type of example of early Buddhist quietism can be found in the fact that early Buddhist arguments against the self often have non-dogmatic conclusions; that is, the conclusion is, strictly speaking, that one should not grasp at a concept of a self rather than a metaphysical denial that such a thing exists. This distinction could be illustrated

with an example. Say I claimed that there is an alien civilization in the Andromeda galaxy at this very moment and that exactly ten of these alien beings are currently contemplating whether they have essential (alien) selves. There is simply no evidence in favor of this claim. But at the same time it seems hasty to strictly deny this claim, since given the immense distance (2.5 million light years) and lack of technological or linguistic means of communication, we have no way of ruling out such a claim, either (perhaps things will be different for our descendants in millions of years).

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (Dīgha Nikāya 2.55–71), for instance, the Buddha says that one should not dwell on speculations about the self, about whether it is material or immaterial, limited or unlimited (Dīgha Nikāya 2.65). In *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3.66–68, the Buddha gives versions of what Mark Siderits (2007) has called the argument from control and the argument from impermanence.[22] The basic idea of each argument is that a self is supposed to be permanent (or at least relatively permanent) and it is that which exercises control over a person; however, the Buddha fails to find anything in experience in terms of the five aggregates that corresponds to these characteristics. As a result of this, the Buddha explains that one should say, "'All body is not mine. I am not this. This is not my permanent Self'" (Saṃyutta Nikāya 3.68, trans. Holder 2006, 85). The same should be said about the four other aggregates: feeling, perception, dispositions, and consciousness. The Buddha goes on to explain the goal of this process.

> Seeing things in this way, the learned noble disciple is disillusioned with the body, with feeling, with perception, with dispositions to action, and with consciousness. Being disillusioned [with the five aggregates] one detaches oneself from lust. Being freed [from lust], one is liberated. (Saṃyutta Nikāya 3. 68, trans. Holder 2006, 86)

Notice that the Buddha does not say that a noble disciple will metaphysically deny the existence of a self, but that such a person will refrain from taking any of the five aggregates to be a self, and thus become detached from the aggregates. I am not claiming, as was once fashionable among scholars such as Caroline Rhys Davids,[23] that the Buddha secretly believes there is something like an *Upaniṣadic* self (although the Buddha's arguments are not entirely unlike some *Upaniṣadic* arguments[24]). My claim is simply that some early Buddhist arguments against the self can be understood to be more in line with quietist, anti-speculative elements of early Buddhism: at least in these passages the Buddha is neither explicitly denying nor affirming a self in a metaphysical sense, but rather recommending that one cease to

identify anything as a self, because doing so is a cause of suffering.

A fourth type of example of early Buddhist quietism can be found in recommendations for the relinquishing of views and expressions of a quietist attitude about engagement with the world. In the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta*, the Buddha describes the cessation of conceptualization and "I-making" in terms strikingly similar to the famous ending of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, a similarity I will discuss further in chapter 2.

> The speculative view that 'the world is eternal' is a jungle of views, a wriggling of views, a writhing of views, the fetter of views, bringing suffering, vexation, despair, and agony. It does not lead to aversion, dispassion, cessation, calmness, higher knowledge, and *nibbāna*. … Therefore, I say that because of the destruction, fading away, cessation, abandoning, and relinquishing of all conceptions, all cogitations, all predispositions of I-making, mine-making, and conceit, the *Tathāgata* is without attachment. (Majjhima Nikāya 1.485–486, trans. Holder 2006, 119–120)

This passage makes a direct link between the cessation of conceptualization, including the cognitive process of "I-making," and being without attachment, which I claim is a major characteristic of early Buddhist quietism. The reference to "higher knowledge" may point to something like a Buddhist version of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism in which a kind of nonconceptual direct knowledge is sought at the expense of mundane conceptual knowledge; alternatively it might be read as a recommendation that one ought to have a non-attached attitude toward one's knowledge claims, as Paul Fuller (2005) has argued. It might even be that "higher knowledge" is simply an attitude of refraining from making claims about speculative philosophical issues.[25]

Whatever the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta*'s idea about "higher knowledge" may be, the early Buddhist quietist recommendation that one should refrain from forming any opinions about at least some topics as an avenue toward non-attachment is a prominent (even if minority) element within early Buddhist texts. This attitude is beautifully described in the *Sutta Nipāta*, which frames the issue in terms of engaging in quarrelsome disputes with others.

> When a man in the world, abiding in views,
> esteems something especially (as) "the highest,"
> then he says all others are inferior;
> in this way he is not beyond disputes.

The man who holds opinions, defining (things) for himself,
comes to further quarrels with the world;
(only) when a man renounces all opinions,
does he make no quarrel with the world.

(*Sutta Nipāta* 894, trans. Collins 1982, 130)

Such quarrels with the world can be harmful insofar as they reinforce a concept of self, of *my* view versus the views of others. Engaging in such disputes will also increase attachment to the view itself. Renouncing all quarrelsome opinions, on the other hand, will eliminate attachment to views and grasping at the concept of self, which will in turn lead to the Buddhist goal of the cessation of suffering.

I am not aiming to settle all scholarly disputes about early Buddhist attitudes toward knowledge, conceptualization, and non-attachment here; these are complex issues, complicated partly by the fact that early Buddhist texts contain distinct, sometimes competing strands of views and attitudes. I am not claiming, for instance, that early Buddhist quietism is the core idea of early Buddhism at the expense of what I have called analysis-insight strand. Indeed, I am puzzled by many scholars' insistence that texts as diverse and multifaceted as early Buddhist texts *could* boil down to a single essential idea or monolithic philosophical orientation. This impulse toward philosophical homogenization may be based on a practitioner's desire to represent some notion of authentic Buddhism or a scholar's desire to encapsulate a vast tradition for ease of summarization, but it is not based, in my opinion, on a careful reading of the texts.

I readily admit that both analysis-insight and quietist strands are present in early Buddhist texts, even that the analysis-insight strand has tended to be the stronger of the two, especially in philosophical texts. My intention is to give some evidence of the early Buddhist identification of the cessation of conceptualization as a kind of intellectual non-attachment. As I will show in chapter 2, this identification influenced Nāgārjuna to create a peculiar kind of knowledge claim that undermines itself, thus leaving one without any opinions, beliefs, concepts, and so forth about philosophical matters.

1.5: Can Skepticism about Philosophy be a Tradition?: *Vitaṇḍa, Prasaṅga, and Prasajya*

My claim in this book is that the roots of the types of skepticism about philosophy later exemplified by Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa can be found in early Indian texts. These later philosophers were making novel contributions, but they were starting with previously existing material. Does this mean there was a tradition of skepticism about philosophy in classical India? Everard Flintoff suggested that there was an Indian skeptical tradition in his seminal article, "Pyrrho and India": "In all this it looks then at the least as though there was a good deal in common between the various scepticisms and perhaps one might even be justified in speaking of a sceptical tradition, which might possibly have gone back to Sañjaya the Sceptic." (Flintoff 1980, 103). While Flintoff suggested the possibility of such a tradition, he didn't attempt to explain the features of this tradition going forward into the classical tradition. This is my task in this book.

In the Indian context one way to discuss a tradition is with the word *darśana*, which can also be translated as "school," but literally means view or viewpoint from the root "*dṛś*"—"to see." I am not claiming that there is a skeptical tradition in the sense of a *darśana*. One might suggest that the Cārvāka *darśana* is a tradition of skepticism. While there is some truth to this suggestion, especially insofar as all Cārvākas doubt many of the knowledge claims of their religious counterparts, many Cārvākas seem to have accepted a kind of commonsense, everyday knowledge as philosophically established. As I will discuss in chapter 4, there were at least three branches of Cārvākas defined along epistemological lines: those who accept perception as the sole means of knowledge, those who accept perception and forms of inference limited to worldly matters, and those who, like Jayarāśi, are skeptical about all means of knowledge. While Jayarāśi should be seen as cultivating seeds of Cārvāka skepticism that were planted earlier in the Indian tradition, these and other skeptical seeds were also cultivated outside the grounds of the Cārvāka tradition. Hence, skepticism in classical India cannot be uniquely identified with the Cārvāka *darśana*.

Furthermore, the etymology of *darśana* implies a specific, articulated view about philosophical matters. Classical Indian skepticism about philosophy is not a particular view about philosophical matters, but rather an attitude about engaging in such philosophical pursuits or a therapeutic activity that targets those views. If anything, skepticism about philosophy is an "anti-*darśana*" rather than a *darśana* itself. Therefore, skepticism about philosophy cannot be a *darśana* for two reasons: it cuts across the typically identified schools of classical Indian philosophy, and it is not itself a particular view about philosophical matters but rather an attitude or therapy.

We might instead look to the etymology of the English word "tradition," which derives from the Latin *traditio* (a handing down, delivery). My contention is that the attitude of skepticism about philosophy was handed down at the very least through the transmission of texts that inspired later philosophers.[26] The thesis of this book is that skepticism about philosophy was handed down from the earliest beginnings of Indian philosophy until at least the end of the classical era. The roots of skepticism were found in the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts and these roots were later cultivated by philosophers in at least three different centuries coming out of what are usually considered to be three different philosophical traditions: Jayarāśi from Cārvāka, Nāgārjuna from Buddhism, and Śrī Harṣa from Advaita Vedānta.

I am developing an alternative historiography of Indian philosophy. My claim is that traditions within Indian philosophy can be distinguished by methods, attitudes, and goals rather than explicitly articulated beliefs, religious affiliation, or placement within traditional doxographies.[27]

There are three elements of the Indian tradition in particular that formed the key methods within the tradition of skepticism about philosophy: *vitaṇḍā*, *prasaṅga*, and *prasajya*. *Vitaṇḍā* is discussed in the *Nyāya Sūtra* as a type of debate in which one seeks to destroy an opponent's view without putting forward a view of one's own (Nyāya Sūtra 1.2.3). *Prasaṅga* came to be a form of argument in which several possible interpretations of an opponent's philosophical thesis are put forward, each being rejected in turn as either internally inconsistent or as incompatible with the opponent's other commitments. This was a standard form of argument for Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. *Prasajya* negation is a "commitmentless denial" that does not commit the denier to the opposite of the thesis being denied (Matilal 1986, 65–67). This allows skeptics to deny their opponents' theses without thereby committing themselves to any alternative philosophical thesis.[28]

Likewise in the coming chapters I will show that Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa employed these methods toward similar—albeit not identical—goals. They all had a largely negative attitude about the typical goals of systematic philosophical inquiry. Each of the three pillars sought to destroy the bases of philosophical conceptualization, Nāgārjuna for the Buddhist quietist goal of relinquishing all views as a means to the ultimate goal of eliminating suffering, Jayarāśi for the Cārvāka purpose of putting aside philosophical/religious concerns and thus enjoying life more fully, and Śrī Harṣa in line with Advaita goal of becoming open to the possibility

of experience of non-dual *brahman*.

1.6 Conclusion: Previewing the Fruits of these Skeptical Roots

In this chapter I hope to have uncovered the roots of skepticism about philosophy in the Indian tradition within the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts. The Ṛg *Veda*, especially the Hymn of Creation, demonstrates that Indian philosophers from the earliest glimmers of philosophy in India were aware of the potential of philosophical inquiry to turn back on itself, an impulse that future chapters will demonstrate found systematic development in each of the three pillars, Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. The *Upaniṣads* contain the roots of what I have called *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, an attitude that received thorough development in Śrī Harṣa's demolition of his opponents' views, especially those of the Nyāya school. Early Buddhist texts contain evidence of the existence of both non-Buddhist and Buddhist forms of skepticism about philosophy, which include the materialism and Sañjayan skepticism that influenced Jayarāśi as well as the early Buddhist quietism that found its most potent proponent in Nāgārjuna.

The extent to which these skeptical roots became the material from which the three pillars were constructed will, I hope, become clear in the remaining chapters. This will provide evidence in favor of my thesis that the philosophical history of India contains a tradition of skepticism about philosophy represented most clearly by Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa. In the conclusion, I shall argue that understanding this tradition ought to be an important part of our contemporary metaphilosophical reflections on the purposes and limits of philosophy. Making these larger conclusions plausible, however, will require several more chapters of detailed argument and textual exegesis. I turn first to Nāgārjuna to show how he synchronizes the analysis-insight and quietist strands of early Buddhist philosophy to form a powerful variety of Buddhist skepticism about philosophy.

NOTES

1. See the introduction for more on the general periodization of Indian philosophy on which I rely in this book, which is based on Perrett (2016, 7–16). See also Franco (2013).

2. For a thorough treatment of the historical, religious, and literary context of

the Ṛg *Veda*, see Jamison and Brereton (2014), "Introduction." See also Gupta (2012, Ch. 2), Edgerton (1965), Doniger O'Flaherty (1981), Panikkar (1977), and Doniger (2009, Ch. 5). Although the periodization given by Perrett (2016), on which I am relying, begins the ancient period around 900 BCE, estimates of the ages of texts during this period are so approximate; I think we are justified in considering the Ṛg *Veda* to be a part of the ancient period even if current estimates tend to date it between 1400 and 1000 BCE.

3. For a history of naturalist elements in the Ṛg *Veda* and the *Upaniṣads*, see Riepe (1961).

4. Koller (1977) discusses skeptical elements of RV 8.89, 9.112, and 10.129.

5. One might glean a version of the problem of evil in RV 7.104 verse 14: "why, Agni knower of creatures, why are you angry with us? Gather into your destruction those who speak hateful words" (Trans. Doniger O'Flaherty 1981, 294).

6. The Nāsadīya been taken non-skeptically, for instance by the fourteenth-century commentator Sāyaṇa, who takes the verse to mean that the overseer does know although no one else does. For discussion and criticism of Sāyaṇa's (somewhat strained) reading, see Jayatilleke (1963, 25–28).

7. In calling the positive sort of knowledge "mystical" I am not necessarily disagreeing with Ganeri's (2007) observation that the self is not a possible object of consciousness in the *Upaniṣads*. Nonetheless, the *Upaniṣads* do frequently describe knowledge of the self whether that knowledge takes the self as an object of a different kind of consciousness or in the sense of a "phenomenological quality of thinking, in the flavour of the experience of 'what it is like' to think" (Ganeri 2007, 35). Since my concern is more with the negative, skeptical side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism (especially insofar as the negative side casts doubt on the prospects for linguistic expressability of knowledge of the self), I will leave the exact nature of the positive characterization of self-knowledge undecided.

8. For more on the *Upaniṣads*' history, authorship, dating, and place within the Vedic corpus as well as discussion of basic *Upaniṣadic* concepts, see Olivelle (1996), Gupta (2012, Ch. 3), Doniger (2009, Ch. 7), Ganeri (2007), Phillips (1995, Ch. 1), Deussen (1966), Edgerton (1965), Aurobindo (1972), and Müller (1962).

9. The *locus classicus* for rethinking the order of the development of the *Upaniṣads* and early Buddhism is Bronkhorst (1993). For a helpful overview of Bronkhorst's more recent work, which has continued to develop his main thesis, see Lubin (2015). Beckwith (2015) relies on Bronkhorst's work as part of an argument that Buddhism was a reaction to Zoroastrianism rather than Brahmanism.

10. Deussen (1966) and Aurobindo (1972) are two notable examples of this trend. Gough (1979) (originally published 1882) is another, although Gough is dismissive of the texts whose philosophy he claims to uncover as representing "the thoughts of thinkers of a lower race" (Gough 1979, 2).

11. For instance, see Edgerton (1965, 150) and Müller (1962, 185).

12. Note that the salt analogy also occurs elsewhere in the *Upaniṣads*, for example, BU 2.4.12. Olivelle's translation of the famous phrase *tat tvam asi* as "that's how you are" contrasts with the more typical "you are that" or "that art thou" (e.g., Edgerton 1965, 177, Müller 1962, 105). For the rationale for this alternative translation, see Brereton (1986).

13. Ganeri helpfully compares Prajāpati's teaching with the indirect methods of Plato or Kierkegaard (Ganeri 2007, 19).

14. For more on Vedānta commentaries on the *Kena Upaniṣad*, see Kumar (1999)

and Prasad (1994).

15. KeU chapters three and four, which contain a story of various gods attempting and failing to understand *brahman*, can be understood as a narrative elaboration of this point. In this story Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), and Indra all fail to understand that an apparition is *brahman*. Vayu (wind) is sometimes understood as representing the intellect (e.g., Prasad 1994, 74), so this can be taken to demonstrate the inadequacy of certain types of knowledge. The goddess Umā, however, does recognize *brahman*, which shows that knowledge of some kind is possible.

16. See Carpenter and Ganeri (2010) for a treatment of later appearances of this paradox in the classical Indian tradition.

17. Early Buddhism could be defined more widely as "Pāli Buddhism" or "the Pāli Canon," or it might be defined more narrowly as "the teachings of the Buddha and his immediate disciples" (Siderits 2007, 15) or the "the Buddhism of the five Nikāyas" (Hoffman 1987, xi). By "early Buddhism" I mean to specify the texts composed in Pāli (a middle Indo-Aryan language related to Sanskrit) that constitute the Theravāda Sutta Piṭaka as opposed to the Vinaya Piṭaka (monastic instructions) and Abdhidhamma Piṭaka (later philosophical systematization). This is a typical use of "early Buddhism" among scholars today (e.g., Hamilton 2000, 1–5). These texts were compiled sometime in the centuries following the Buddha's death in the century before or after 400 BCE. According to Theravāda tradition the texts were first written down in the first century BCE. Based on linguistic evidence modern scholars date much of the material in the texts to the third century BCE (Gethin 1998, 42; Hamilton 2000, 3). Collins (1990) provides an important caveat to any attempt to identify early Buddhism with the Pāli Canon: he gives detailed historical reasons to see the Pāli Canon as it currently exists to have been fixed at a relatively late date (around the fourth century CE), and thus the Pāli Canon should not be taken as necessarily entirely representative of Buddhism as it existed in its earliest centuries. In this study I am taking the Sutta Piṭaka to represent the most complete evidence available concerning the earliest stages of Buddhist philosophy in India, but I am not making any dogmatic historical claims that the Sutta Piṭaka is *the* complete and accurate representation of early Buddhism. For my purposes, it suffices to show that the Sutta Piṭaka, or something much like it, can be seen as a direct influence on Buddhist philosophers such as Nāgārjuna. For more on the wider historical, religious, and philosophical aspects of early Buddhism see Jayatilleke (1963), Collins (1982), Hoffman (1987), Collins (1990), Walshe (1995), Gethin (1998), Hamilton (2000), Fuller (2005), Bodhi (2005), and Ganeri (2007, Ch. 2).

18. A similar view is expressed by Virocana in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.8.4.

19. Walshe reports that the Pāli *amarā-vikheppikā* is "the name of a slippery fish, perhaps an eel, which escapes capture by wriggling" (Walshe 1995, 541 n. 58). For more on this term, see Jayatilleke (1963, 121–122).

20. Collins also notes that his use of the term "quietism" should not be conflated with the specific movement of Quietism in seventeenth-century Christianity (Collins 1982, 139). I make a similar caveat, while also noting that early Buddhist quietism is a specifically Buddhist attitude related to Buddhist goals like the cessation of suffering and elimination of grasping at selfhood.

21. The four questions on the Tathāgata constitute a Buddhist tetralemma/*catuṣkoṭi*: Does the Tathāgata exist after death? Does he not exist after death? Does he both exist and not exist after death? Does he neither exist nor not exist after death?

22. See Siderits (2007, 38–50). Collins (1982) identifies the same arguments, but

he calls them “the argument from lack of control” and “What is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change is ‘not fit’ to be regarded as self” (Collins 1982, 97–98).

23. For discussions of various claims that the Buddha believed in some sort of substantial self, see Rahula (1959, 55–56) and Collins (1982, 7–10).

24. Jayatilleke (1963, 38–40) notes that the Buddha’s argument by process of elimination is similar to *Upaniṣadic* methods such as that used by Prajāpati at *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–15.

25. I will argue in chapter 2 that Nāgārjuna’s skepticism is best viewed as incompatible with any sort of mystical knowledge claim, which puts it at odds with *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

26. Whether these traditions were handed down through interpersonal transmission from teacher to student in the traditional Indian model is something I cannot ascertain at this time. This study will limit itself to the available textual evidence. It may be that skepticism about philosophy was a living tradition of interpersonal transmission, it may be that later philosophers were inspired by reading particular texts, or perhaps it was some combination of interpersonal transmission and textual inspiration. My sense of “tradition” should be understood to be broad enough to encompass any of these possibilities, with the available textual evidence supporting at least the model of textual inspiration.

27. Others have made similar suggestions about the limitations of the typical school model. Daya Krishna has criticized what he calls the “myth of the schools” as impeding our understanding of classical Indian philosophers (Krishna 1997, 13). John Taber has suggested that *pramāṇavāda* should be viewed as “a single, vigorous, and more or less continuous debate” that took place across schools (Taber 2005, xi). Stephen Phillips has claimed that we could “see Vācaspati—and others, of course—as philosophers whose resources are not restricted to any single textual, philosophic tradition, and whose positions as philosophers span traditions and schools” (Phillips 2015, 6).

28. For more on *prasajya* negation and its opposition to *paryudāsa* negation, see Matilal (1971), Ruegg (1977), Chakravarti (1980), and Westerhoff (2006).

Chapter 2

Nāgārjuna's Buddhist Skepticism

From Emptiness to the Pacification of Conceptual Proliferation

The pacification of all cognitive grasping and the pacification of conceptual proliferation are peace.
Nowhere, to no one has any dharma at all been taught by the Buddha.

—Nāgārjuna,
Mūlamadhyamakakārikā *25.24*[1]

The previous chapter focused on the period of ancient or early Indian philosophy. Starting in this chapter, I move to the beginning of the classical period (c. 200 CE–1300 CE), a period that saw the formation of the Indian philosophical schools (*darśanas*) as well as increased systematization and argumentative rigor. Whereas philosophy in the ancient period was often embedded within narratives that relied heavily on parables, metaphors, and the like, the philosophical style of the classical period focused on explicit argument, although such arguments reveal their pedigree stemming from the ancient debate traditions as they were often presented in a dialogical fashion between the author and an imagined opponent (*pūrvapakṣa*). Another feature of Indian philosophy in the classical period is the appearance of root texts typically called *sūtras* or *kārikās* as well as the extensive proliferation of commentaries and sub-commentaries on these root texts. Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhymakakārikā* ("Root Verses on the Middle Way") is usually seen as one of the oldest of these root texts, one that forms the basis for the Madhyamaka ("Middle Way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy.

There is little about Nāgārjuna (c. 150–200 CE) that has remained noncontroversial in the eighteen centuries since his death. Even Nāgārjuna's status as a proponent of Mahāyāna Buddhism or as the founder of the Madhyamaka school has been disputed, although the

majority of contemporary scholars now accept these characterizations along with his authorship of at least two texts: the *Mūlamadhymakakārikā* (hereafter: MMK) and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (hereafter: VV). Yet the precise nature of the content of these enigmatic texts remains a matter of extensive dispute. In India, Tibet, East Asia, and the West, Nāgārjuna has been interpreted as a nihilist, mystic, anti-realist, empiricist, skeptic, deconstructionist, irrationalist, philosopher of openness, transcendental metaphysician, philosophical deflationist, and more.[2]

The root of much of these interpretive disputes is the fact that Nāgārjuna's texts appear to contain two mutually incompatible tendencies. On the one hand Nāgārjuna seems to be presenting a series of philosophical arguments in favor of the thesis that all things are empty of essence, what can be called the thesis of universal emptiness. Consider, for instance, this frequently discussed verse from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK): "That which is dependent origination, and that which is designated based on having grasped something, that we call emptiness and the middle path itself" (MMK 24.18).[3] On the other hand there are passages in which Nāgārjuna seems to be encouraging readers to eschew *any* thesis whatsoever, perhaps even a thesis of universal emptiness. For example, the MMK ends with this famous yet puzzling verse: "I bow to him, Gautama, who, by means of compassion, taught the true *dharma* for the purpose of abandoning all views" (MMK 27.30).[4] How can Nāgārjuna simultaneously argue in favor of a view that all things are empty while also encouraging the abandonment of all views? Does one of these tendencies take priority over the other? Does Nāgārjuna contradict himself, and if so, does he do so intentionally? Does Nāgārjuna mean just what he says, or should some of his statements be taken non-literally? What is the point of his philosophical procedure?

In this chapter I present my skeptical interpretation, which offers a distinctive set of answers to these questions. The thesis of this chapter is that Nāgārjuna is best interpreted as a skeptic about philosophy in the sense discussed in the introduction and chapter 1 rather than in the modern sense of epistemological skepticism. I would like to repeat my plea to readers to have an open mind about what I mean by skepticism, particularly what it means to say that Nāgārjuna is a skeptic about philosophy in the specific sense outlined in the introduction of this book (section 0.2). Rather than supporting a philosophical view about the nature of reality or knowledge, Nāgārjuna's arguments for emptiness are for the purpose of purging one of any view, thesis, or theory whatsoever, even views about emptiness itself. I will demonstrate this strategy in action in chapter 3 with regard to theories of causation. This and the next chapter will

demonstrate Nāgārjuna's place as the first of the three pillars of the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy.

My plan for this chapter is to show how my interpretation of Nāgārjuna incorporates the best of the most plausible existing interpretations (mysticism, anti-realism, and epistemological skepticism), but without the weaknesses of these interpretations. Skepticism about philosophy is appropriately enough a middle way between mysticism and anti-realism. (Readers less interested in the terrain of contemporary Nāgārjuna scholarship may wish to skip to the core of my own interpretation in sections 2.3 and 2.4.) Lastly, I argue that Nāgārjuna's skepticism should be seen as a legitimate development of the type of early Buddhist quietism discussed in the previous chapter and that my skeptical interpretation also has historical precedents within the Buddhist tradition in India, China, and Tibet.

2.1 Interpreting Nāgārjuna: Mysticism, Anti-Realism, and Epistemological Skepticism

Nāgārjuna is perhaps one of the most variably interpreted philosophers in history. A detailed treatment of all available interpretations would require far more than I can accomplish here. Instead I summarize three lines of existing interpretations that provide helpful background for understanding my own interpretation: mystical, anti-realist, and skeptical interpretations.

Mystical interpretations often point to the recommendations against views and conceptualization, somewhat in the vein of early Buddhist quietism as discussed in chapter 1. According to mystical interpretations, Nāgārjuna's purpose is to clear our cognitive ground to create space for ineffable direct awareness of reality. T. R. V. Murti has offered one of the clearest mystical interpretations. In a Kantian, Hegelian, and Vedānta idiom, Murti claims, "This ever-vigilant dialectical consciousness of all philosophy is another kind of absolute. For, it rises above all positions, transcending the duality of the thesis and antithesis which eminently contain the whole universe" (Murti 1955, 328). Elsewhere he explains, "the Real is transcendent to thought" (Murti 1955, 330). For Murti, the negative dialectic leads to transcending all theorizing and then to the direct apprehension of the Absolute or the Real, an interpretation that makes Nāgārjuna close the type of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism explained in the previous chapter.

Others offer similar mystical interpretations. John Taber suggests that the purpose of the MMK is to describe a vision "which for

Nāgārjuna is ultimately based not on discursive reasoning but on some kind of non-discursive insight" (Taber 1998, 237). Masao Abe explains that ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) is "śūnyatā, Emptiness completely free from conceptual distinction and beyond verbal expression" (Abe 1983, 57).[5] Stephen Phillips claims that Nāgārjuna possesses a "mystical motivation" (Phillips 1995, 16).[6]

I am relying on the characterization of mystical experience popularized by William James.[7] According to James, a mystical experience is characterized by "1. *Ineffability*. . . . 2. *Noetic quality*. . . . 3. *Transiency*. . . . 4. *Passivity*" (James 1958, 319). The first two criteria are most important. An experience is mystical first in being ineffable: "The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others" (James 1958, 319). Thus, according to mystical interpretations, Nāgārjuna's texts are intended to *engender* a particular type of experience in their readers, rather than merely articulating and defending a philosophical thesis. Another essential characterization of mystical experience is "noetic quality": "Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect" (James 1958, 319). If Nāgārjuna is a mystic, he intends his readers to come to possess knowledge of some kind, although such knowledge is not the result of philosophical argumentation or standard sensory experience.

Mystical interpretations of Nāgārjuna are right that there is something going on outside the scope of straightforward philosophical argumentation. Consider the following verse in a mystical light: "The pacification of all cognitive grasping and the pacification of conceptual proliferation are peace. Nowhere, to no one has any *dharma* at all been taught by the Buddha" (MMK, 25.24).[8] For a mystical Nāgārjuna, the negative dialectic of emptiness leads to the pacification of normal cognitive activity and, since mystical knowledge is ineffable, the Buddha could not have taught anything about such knowledge, at least not directly.

More recent innovations in Nāgārjuna scholarship are found in the form of anti-realist interpretations, which provide a powerful interpretation of the positive arguments in favor of emptiness. Mark Siderits is the most influential proponent of an anti-realist interpretation, although Jan Westerhoff is another major proponent. For Siderits, anti-realism is foremost a semantic theory, a theory about truth conditions. This is a rejection of semantic realism, which states that the truth conditions of a statement are set by mind-independent

reality. Semantic realism is one part of a broader theory of metaphysical realism, which Siderits defines as being composed of three theses: "(1) truth is correspondence between proposition and reality; (2) reality is mind-independent; (3) there is one true theory that correctly describes reality" (Siderits 2000, 11). One might also think of these as three kinds of realism: (1) semantic, (2) metaphysical, and (3) epistemological.

The rejection of these theses is what Siderits takes Nāgārjuna's project to be: "To say that all 'things' are empty is just to make the anti-realist point that we cannot give content to the metaphysical realist's notion of a mind-independent reality with a nature (whether expressible or inexpressible) that can be mirrored in cognition" (Siderits 2000, 24). The emphasis in Siderits's expositions of his interpretation varies somewhat,[9] but the core idea is that each of the three realist theses—semantic, metaphysical, and epistemological—is false. A favored slogan for Siderits's interpretation is: "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth" (Siderits 2007, 202).[10]

For example, Siderits's anti-realist interpretation of chapter one of the MMK offers an account of how the negative *prasaṅga* arguments against causation constitute an argument *for* emptiness of inherent nature (*svabhāva*) on the part of anything that is caused (Siderits 2004; Siderits 2007, 191–199). That is, the truth about statements about cause and effect are not set by mind-independent essences.

Nāgārjuna has been called a skeptic for at least several decades, so I am not the first to proffer a skeptical interpretation. However, both supporters and opponents of skeptical interpretations are sometimes unclear about what they mean by "skepticism." B. K. Matilal, for instance, provides illumination on the topic of Nāgārjuna's skepticism, but he makes Nāgārjuna's skepticism into a kind of mystical skepticism, albeit not quite to the same extent as Murti (Matilal 1986, 46–68; Matilal 2002, 72–83).[11] Jay Garfield's comparisons with Sextus, Hume, and Wittgenstein are incredibly fruitful, but it is often difficult to see the line between skepticism and anti-realism in Garfield's work (e.g., Garfield 2002, Ch. 1). Adrian Kuzminski offers intriguing comparisons with Pyrrhonism, but the problem is that Sextus and Nāgārjuna become nearly identical in his reading (Kuzminski 2007; 2008).[12] David Burton distinguishes two possible skeptical interpretations: one close to external-world skepticism and another that is "so thorough that it turns upon itself" (Burton 2004, 117).[13] Elsewhere Burton fully develops a version of this second interpretation, although he dismisses as inconsistent with Nāgārjuna's purported truth-claims about emptiness (Burton 1999, Ch. 2).

Several scholars have agreed with Burton in distinguishing skeptical and non-skeptical interpretations along the lines of whether

the interpreter thinks that Nāgārjuna is making truth-claims (Arnold 2005, 134; Dreyfus 2011, 92). According to this line of thought, non-skeptical interpretations take Nāgārjuna and other Mādhyamikas to be advocating one or more truth-claims as the result of their philosophical work. For anti-realist interpretations, the truth-claim is that realism is false; for mystical interpretations there is some truth to be known, albeit not one that can be directly expressed. Skeptical interpreters, however, do not take Nāgārjuna to be accepting any final truth-claims.

I don't see this as the line between skeptical and non-skeptical interpretations, but rather as a distinction between different kinds of skepticism.[14] Dreyfus formulates the question clearly: "Is skepticism a doctrine that makes truth claims by asserting a thesis (in this case the fact that there are no well-established means of reliable cognition), or is it an altogether different approach that avoids the commitment to any claim through a complete suspension of judgment?" (Dreyfus 2011, 92). Using the terminology I discussed in the introduction, we could ask: Is Nāgārjuna advocating a form of epistemological skepticism or a form of skepticism about philosophy? Does he intend to make truth-claims about human knowledge or is his intent to cultivate an attitude of non-attachment to any philosophical view whatsoever as in early Buddhist quietism?

Skeptical interpretations have generally not sufficiently attended to this question. Matilal at times seems to think of Nāgārjuna as a skeptic who makes the truth-claim that human knowledge is impossible: "It is his contention that in the long run the concept of the standard of proof would be found to be self-refuting or self-stultifying" (Matilal 1986, 51). Elsewhere Matilal admits that epistemological skepticism would make Nāgārjuna inconsistent and thus Nāgārjuna must be using a type of negation called *prasajya* negation, or as Matilal puts it, "commitmentless denial" or "illocutionary negation" (Matilal 1986, 65–67).[15] This allows skeptics to negate their opponents' claims without asserting their own truth-claim. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this type of negation became one of the main features of the skeptical tradition in classical India.[16]

Dreyfus and Garfield wonder if we might read Nāgārjuna's famous commentator, Candrakīrti (c. seventh century CE), as a "Constructive Pyrrhonian," by which they mean a philosopher who "offers us a description of our epistemic practices *just as practices*, that is, without defending them, as well as a critique of any possible defense of those practices" (Dreyfus and Garfield 2011, 126). This interpretation allows Mādhyamikas to make some constructive philosophical points as opposed to the non-constructive skepticism of Patsab Nyimadrak.[17] Garfield endorses a more constructive interpretation: for him, the

Madhyamaka claim is that causal explanations are reducible to observable regularities without recourse to real causal powers (Garfield 1995, 103–123; Garfield 2002, 18–20). However, Dreyfus makes an excellent point: "it is problematic to understand skepticism as being based on the suspension of any truth claim while still attempting to find a place for constructive philosophy" (Dreyfus 2011, 94). Constructing a philosophical theory requires at least some truth-claims about the subject of that theory. For instance, a conventionalist, contextualist epistemology of the kind Jan Westerhoff (2010) attributes to Nāgārjuna in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV) would involve truth-claims concerning conventions and contexts in human epistemic practice.

I am not suggesting that all other skeptical interpretations are insufficiently skeptical. "Skepticism" is many things to many people. Some forms of skepticism involve truth-claims about the possibility of human knowledge, human cognitive abilities, or other topics. My aim is to develop a skeptical interpretation in which Nāgārjuna is ultimately neither making any truth-claim nor engaging in constructive philosophy. My interpretation can make sense of the core interpretive peculiarities of Nāgārjuna's texts, which in turn uncovers his place as one of the three pillars of the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy.

2.2 The Middle Way between Mysticism and Anti-Realism

My interpretation of Nāgārjuna combines the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of the mystical and anti-realist interpretations.[18] My claim is that mystical readings go too far and anti-realist readings don't go far enough. My interpretation is the middle way between these extremes, and the middle is a good place for an interpretation of a Madhyamaka philosopher to be.

As I mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, there are broadly two types of activity in Nāgārjuna's MMK. There are, on the one hand, arguments *for* emptiness, which include *prasaṅga* arguments against other theories, but also more positive arguments. On the other hand, there are expressions of positionlessness and recommendations against holding any view (*dṛṣṭi*) or engaging in conceptualization (*prapañca*), even with regard to emptiness itself. It is difficult to see how these two types of utterances can be reconciled. Most existing interpretations do not fare well in doing so.

One might raise the question of anachronism with regard to Murti's heavy use of Hegelian, Kantian, and Vedānta concepts[19], but my

concern with mystical interpretations is more general. I have two criticisms of mystical readings. First, mystical readings tend to downplay the fact that Nāgārjuna makes what appear to be positive statements about emptiness. Consider the famous verse cited earlier: "That which is dependent origination, and that which is designated based on having grasped something, that we call emptiness and the middle path itself" (MMK 24.18). It seems that Nāgārjuna is making a positive claim about emptiness and its relation to various Buddhist concepts (whatever the content of that claim may be). Mystical interpreters could say this claim is meant to be relinquished, but a mystical interpretation retains some mystery about what exactly prompts the move from positive claims to an ineffable experience.

Mystical interpreters might respond that such verses are attempting to explain, albeit incompletely, the content of mystical experience. W. T. Stace, for instance, argues that mystical experience can't be wholly ineffable, because otherwise mystics would never have written about their experiences (Stace 1960, 291). Such experiences are only ineffable while they are occurring, but they can be conceptualized and described when mystics later remember the experience (Stace 1960, 297). Thus, it could be that Nāgārjuna is describing his experience in a somewhat incomplete sense. This response can be answered by my second objection.

My second objection is that there is little if any textual evidence that Nāgārjuna thought there was an ineffable experience that would result from his philosophical procedure. There are a handful of verses that discuss reality (*tattva*), such as MMK 18.9[20], but there is nothing to suggest these must be taken as transcendent reality to be revealed by mystical experience. Mystics might claim that an ineffable experience, by its very ineffability, cannot be truly described, so any language they use at best acts as guide toward such experience. Nāgārjuna may have meant for his language to act as such a guide, but he never tells us so.

To illustrate my point, consider some contrast cases. Among the most explicit mystics are Sufi philosophers such as Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali describes a kind of experience, "which the Sufis call 'ecstasy' ('hāl'), that is to say, according to them, a state in which, absorbed in themselves and in the suspension of sense-perceptions, they have visions beyond the reach of the intellect" (Al-Ghazali no date, 18). Al-Ghazali also illustrates the distinction between mundane knowledge and mystical knowledge via the metaphor of the difference between knowing the scientific definition of drunkenness and experiencing drunkenness (Al-Ghazali no date, 43–44). If Al-Ghazali demonstrates that mystics can refer explicitly to their mystical intentions, why would Nāgārjuna conceal his mystical tendencies?

Closer to Nāgārjuna's historical context there are clear exhortations to mystical experience in the *Upaniṣads* and later Vedānta interpretations and perhaps in some Buddhist contexts. The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* could be seen as a further example of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, as it downplays regular discursive knowledge while accepting a different kind of mystical knowledge. The text discusses four states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and a fourth state called *turīya*).

> The fourth is measureless, not to be employed, in which there is the cessation of the phenomenal world (*prapañcopaśamaḥ*), the auspicious, the non-dual. In this way the syllable "*o*ṃ" just *is* the self (*ātman*). One who knows in this way enters into the *ātman* by means of the *ātman*. (*Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* 12)[21]

The last sentence fits James's characterization of a "noetic quality," or being a state of knowledge. The Vedānta philosopher Gauḍapāda claims, "By the sages who have gone to the opposite shore of the Veda and who are free from passion, fear and anger, this [*ātman*], in which there is the cessation of the phenomenal world, which is without a second, is indeed seen without imagination" (Āgama Śāstra 2.35).[22] This idea of seeing the self (*ātman*) without imagination could be seen as a mystical insight, since one does not see the *ātman* with one's eyes! There is a common analogy between mystical experience and sensory experience: mystical experience is more like perceptual experience than it is like rational or argumentative knowledge (James 1958, 339). Nāgārjuna, however, does not employ perceptual metaphors to discuss direct experience of a higher reality.[23]

There are also Buddhist texts amenable to mystical interpretations. There are two main types of Buddhist meditation techniques: tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*). The *Samaññaphala Sutta* describes the states of consciousness known as the four absorptions (Pāli: *jhāna*, Sanskrit: *dhyāna*) in which the mind becomes highly concentrated. These absorptions are examples of tranquility meditation. The first absorption is described as follows: "Being thus detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, he enters and remains in the first jhāna, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy" (DN 2.75, trans. Walshe 1995, 102). The states become increasingly concentrated until the fourth: "A monk, having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, enters and remains in the fourth jhāna which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness" (DN 2.81, trans. Walshe 1995, 103). Robert Gimello claims that they are mystical

states because they evoke “a feeling of unity or oneness” beyond regular experience (Gimello 1978, 188).

Tranquility meditation often prepares a meditator for insight meditation (*vipassanā*): “And so, with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, and having gained imperturbability, he directs and inclines his mind towards knowing and seeing” (DN 2.83, trans. Walshe 1995, 104). In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhana Sutta* monks use this technique for the purpose of attaining a deeper understanding of Buddhist doctrines: “a monk abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in respect of the Four Noble Truths. How does he do so? Here, a monk knows it as it really is: ‘This is suffering’” (DN 22.17, trans. Walshe 1995, 344).

Of the two main branches of Buddhist meditation—tranquility (*samatha)* and insight *(vipassanā)*—it is insight (*vipassanā*) that is closest to the Jamesian characterization of mysticism. Buddhist traditions generally claim that *samatha* meditative states, such as the *jhānas*, do not reveal the truth about reality, but are exercises for developing one-pointedness of mind.[24] Thus, *samatha* meditation lacks a “noetic quality”; it does not lead to knowledge. On the other hand, insight might be seen as a method of engendering mystical experiences that are ineffable and with a noetic quality.[25] Gimello, however, claims that *samatha* meditation is mystical, while *vipassanā* is a practice of careful thinking (Gimello 1978, 189).[26] While I disagree with Gimello’s assertion that *samatha* is a form of mysticism since it lacks a noetic quality, I remain unsure whether *vipassanā* is a form of mystical experience, since it is unclear whether *vipassanā* can be both mystical and a type of thinking.

In any case, Nāgārjuna would have been familiar with *Upaniṣadic* strands of mysticism and, although the Buddhist situation is more ambiguous, he would have also been familiar with Buddhist texts more amenable to mystical interpretations. Thus, he had ample philosophical terminology he could have chosen to use. That he did not choose to use such terminology offers evidence against mystical interpretations.

The most common reason for mystical interpretations is, I suspect, more indirect. Mystical interpretations perhaps attempt to make sense of positionlessness under the assumption that Nāgārjuna must have had some positive realization as his ultimate goal. The assumption—shared by contemporary and classical proponents—is that as a Buddhist, Nāgārjuna is committed to insight into the true nature of reality; if he has no philosophical theses in an ordinary sense, he must be advocating another method of insight, namely, mystical experience. Later Buddhist commentators do discuss such direct mystical experience, but Nāgārjuna does not. It is likely that these later

commentators added this notion of Nāgārjuna's texts as a means to mystical experience for precisely the reason just given.

This assumption that all Buddhists require positive insight into reality, however, overlooks the existence of early Buddhist quietism. We need not posit mystical experience to make sense of Nāgārjuna, since there are other interpretations capable of accounting for Nāgārjuna's seemingly paradoxical pairing of emptiness and positionlessness. Thus, I have given some reasons for thinking that mystical interpretations go too far; there is no good textual evidence for mysticism and we need not posit a mystical insight in order to make sense of Nāgārjuna's texts.

Let me turn now to the anti-realist interpretation. This interpretation makes a lot of sense of Nāgārjuna's positive statements about emptiness as a philosophical thesis: there is no essence (*svabhāva*) for realist statements to be about. When it comes to statements of positionlessness, however, the anti-realist interpretation does not fare as well. Whatever else anti-realism may be, it is a philosophical theory, one that purports to explain something about how things are: that there really is no mind-independent reality.[27]

Consider one expression of positionlessness: "The antidote to all views is proclaimed by the conquerors to be emptiness. Those who have a view of emptiness the conquerors called incurable" (MMK 13.8).[28] Siderits tries to make this work by inserting "metaphysical" in square brackets before the word "view," indicating that what Nāgārjuna has in mind are views about ultimate reality (Siderits 2007, 191; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 145). Such a thesis would be what Pyrrhonian skeptics called "negative dogmatism," or a view or theory about how things are *not*.

On this point Adrian Kuzminski asks, "if Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka [*sic*] were both examples of dogmatic skepticism [i.e., "negative dogmatism"], it's hard to see what motivation adherents of these schools would have had to make such nonsensical, paradoxical statements about their own procedures, which go far beyond anything necessary to express dogmatic skepticism" (Kuzminski 2008, 63). If Nāgārjuna were an anti-realist, why would he include seemingly paradoxical statements about not having any views or theses? Why would he not simply say, "my view is that everything is conceptually constructed" or "my thesis is that all things are empty"? Why go the extra step of eschewing all views?

A second problem is that it is difficult to see how a thesis of universal emptiness understood in anti-realist terms would not contradict itself. Briefly, if all things are empty (and thus lacking any essential, mind-independent characteristics), then the thesis of

emptiness would simultaneously possess and lack the characteristic of being empty (it possesses the characteristic by stipulated definition and lacks it due to the content of the idea of universal emptiness).[29] In fact it is likely, given the textual evidence I will discuss in the next two sections, that Nāgārjuna fully intended such a thesis to undermine itself.

Thus, mystical interpretations go too far in adding the superfluous hypothesis that Nāgārjuna must have intended some sort of mystical insight, while anti-realist interpretations don't go far enough in their inability to make sense of expressions of positionlessness.

2.3 Nāgārjuna's Two Phases

On my skeptical interpretation, Nāgārjuna has two general phases in his philosophical procedure, corresponding to the two kinds of statements I identified earlier: those that express a view of emptiness and those that eschew all views. In the first phase Nāgārjuna argues in favor of a thesis of emptiness and against essence (*svabhāva*). Here Nāgārjuna can profitably be understood in anti-realist terms. In the second phase Nāgārjuna demonstrates that, while the thesis of emptiness undermines all other philosophical views, it also undermines itself, thus leaving one without any views, theses, or positions whatsoever. This second phase is what mystical interpretations mistakenly claim is a step to ineffable mystical experience, but in fact Nāgārjuna means to stop just where he does: with the purging of philosophical impulses; in other words, Nāgārjuna is a skeptic about philosophy.

Nāgārjuna's texts are not a steady march from phase one into phase two. He moves freely between the two phases, injecting emptiness where needed. Yet a tendency to move toward the second phase is demonstrated in the MMK insofar as expressions of phase two are found in the dedication (*mangalaṃ*), at the end of several chapters, and especially at the end of the text as a whole.[30]

An obvious objection to my interpretation is that it is self-refuting or logically inconsistent to claim that one is making no claim. Either the uttering of the claim renders the claim false, or the claim itself is inconsistent with the notion that one is not making a claim. This sort of objection goes at least as far back in the Indian tradition as the *Nyāya Sūtra*, which is probably roughly contemporaneous with Nāgārjuna himself.[31] One way to answer to this objection can be found in ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism, a tradition that faced similar inconsistency objections. According to Harald Thorsrud, the charge of inconsistency is a category mistake: "Just as it is neither consistent nor

inconsistent to ride a bicycle, the practice of scepticism, in so far as it is something the sceptic *does*, can be neither consistent nor inconsistent" (Thorsrud 2009, 146).[32] Likewise, Nāgārjuna is presenting a philosophical practice with a therapeutic, rather than a theoretical, goal. While phase one looks like a language-game of giving reasons and arguments in favor of a philosophical position, in phase two Nāgārjuna is playing a different game.

Nāgārjuna considers a similar objection in VV 5–6: if the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) are empty, then they cannot perform their function of supporting Nāgārjuna's thesis that all things are empty, and therefore Nāgārjuna's thesis is self-refuting. Much like Sextus, Nāgārjuna responds that he has no thesis (*pratijñā*) (VV 29). He then embarks on a lengthy critique of the very idea of a means of knowledge *(pramāṇa*) by means of which one would support a philosophical theory (VV 31–51).[33] The exchange is roughly this: the opponent claims that Nāgārjuna cannot support his thesis with a means of knowledge, and he responds that nobody can support a thesis with a means of knowledge, but at least he doesn't pretend to be supporting a philosophical thesis. His intentions are ultimately therapeutic rather than theoretical.

2.4 How Skepticism about Philosophy Takes Both Phases Seriously

My skeptical interpretation can account for the presence of both the arguments for emptiness and the expressions of positionlessness. It sometimes seems as if Nāgārjuna is arguing in favor of a thesis of emptiness, because he really is arguing in favor of a thesis of emptiness. It sometimes seems as if Nāgārjuna is rejecting all philosophical views because he really is rejecting all philosophical views. Granted phase two is the primary goal, but one reaches phase two precisely by taking the arguments for emptiness seriously. Phase one is the medicine one must take to make phase two possible: consider MMK 13.8, "The antidote to all views is proclaimed by the conquerors to be emptiness. Those who have a view of emptiness the conquerors called incurable." In his commentary, Candrakīrti quotes a Mahāyāna *sūtra*[34] in which emptiness is compared to a medicine that, once it has cured the intended illness, must purge itself from the body (PP, p. 208–9).[35] While I am not aware of the purgative drug metaphor in any early Buddhist texts, it is reminiscent of the raft metaphor at MN 1.135, which I discussed in chapter 1. Even though Nāgārjuna argues for emptiness in phase one, in phase two emptiness, following the purgative drug metaphor, undermines itself along with

all other philosophical views. Likewise, following the raft metaphor, it is ultimately meant to be set aside after one has forded to the quietist shore.

Most philosophers are accustomed to something like phase one. Philosophers put forward arguments, refute other arguments, and so forth. But what is it like to inhabit phase two? Phase two is beautifully described in MMK 25.24, "The pacification of all cognitive grasping and the pacification of conceptual proliferation are peace. Nowhere, to no one has any *dharma* at all been taught by the Buddha." Candrakīrti's commentary explains, "that which is the pacification, or cessation, of all bases of conceptual proliferation, that is *nirvāṇa*. . . . Also, pacification of conceptual proliferation, because there is non-activity of words, is peace, because of the non-functioning of thought" (PP, 236).[36] The pacification of grasping and "conceptual proliferation" (*prapañca*) is about as thorough an end to philosophical speculation as could be imagined. It may seem odd to claim that the pacification of conceptual proliferation constitutes *nirvāṇa*, but Candrakīrti says that it is only when all bases of conceptual proliferation have ceased that *nirvāṇa* is reached. Even before *nirvāṇa*, it could be worthwhile to develop the disposition to lessen attachment to views, concepts, and thoughts, a sentiment that develops out of early Buddhist quietism.[37]

The notion of the "pacification of conceptual proliferation" (*prapañcopaśama*) is vital to my interpretation as it gives us the best clue about what Nāgārjuna is attempting to avoid. "*Prapañca*" comes from the root "*pac*" or "*pañc*" and has primary meanings of "expansion, development, manifestation." In philosophy, it is "the expansion of the universe, the visible world." In other contexts, it is "deceit, trick, fraud, error" (Monier-Williams 1994, 681). For Nāgārjuna, however, it is important to recognize the Buddhist history of the word, going back to its role in early Buddhist quietism. According to Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, "*prapañca*" comes from the Pāli "*papañca*," which is "very hard to define." The word has been rendered into Tibetan as meaning, "spreading out, enlargement," and "activity," and into Chinese as meaning "frivolous talk" or "falsehood." Edgerton adds that, "The freedom from prapañca is always praised" and that the word is "closely associated with vikalpa, and the contexts suggest *vain fancy, false imagining*" (Edgerton 2004, 380–381). Steven Collins points out that "*papañcā* are said to have ideas (or perception) as their cause; the 'root of imaginings and estimations' is said to be the idea 'I am the thinker' . . . an idea described as an 'internal craving'" (Collins 1982, 141). For Madhyamaka, this idea came to be associated closely with language. According to Paul Williams, "'*prapañca*' in the Madhyamaka seems to

indicate firstly the utterance itself, secondly the process of reasoning and entertaining involved in any articulation, and thirdly further utterances which result from this process" (Williams 1980, 32).

The pacification (*upaśama*)[38] of *prapañca* is the goal of phase two. The preoccupation with philosophical theories relies on *prapañca* in the sense of involving the expansion of concepts and language (hence the translation, "conceptual proliferation"). *Prapañca* has a negative affective dimension as it involves attachment to concepts and utterances. This is what Nāgārjuna means when he says that the Buddha did not teach any dharma (MMK 25.24). The Buddha did not offer a theory, view, or thesis; rather, according to Nāgārjuna, the Buddha meant to cure us of the disease of desiring to support theories. In phase one, one might be convinced that all beings really are empty; in phase two, one ceases to grasp at any one answer. Both mysticism and anti-realism, in positing either that there is or is not some ultimate reality, miss the ultimate point of Nāgārjuna's procedure. The end goal is to stop desiring either mystical insight into absolute reality or the anti-realist conceptual construction of theories that there are no absolutes. The point is to stop trying to give a theory of anything, even a theory of universal emptiness. Thus, my interpretation allows us to take Nāgārjuna literally when he denies having a view (*dṛṣṭi*) or thesis (*pratijñā*). Such statements are not meant to imply a restriction to false views or a ladder to mystical insight; Nāgārjuna means just what he says.

Given the radical differences between phases one and two, what could the link between these two phases possibly be? The answer begins in the penultimate verse of the MMK: "And thus, due to the emptiness of all beings, in regard to what, for whom, of what things at all, will views, concerning eternality and so forth, be possible?" (MMK 27.29).[39] If emptiness is accepted as a philosophical theory in phase one and allowed to do its purgative work, then eventually there ceases to be anything for a philosophical theory about emptiness to be about or any basis for such a theory. This peculiar feature has been called the emptiness of emptiness.[40] The emptiness of emptiness rules out any view of emptiness: "since we cannot view emptiness even as empty, by virtue of its very emptiness, we cannot have a view of emptiness" (Garfield 2002, 59). Emptiness is the lack of characteristics, so emptiness cannot, after analysis is complete, be a characteristic; it cannot have the characteristic of emptiness that would form the content of a view about emptiness—hence, the emptiness of emptiness. It helps to understand MMK 27.29 in light of Candrakīrti's purgative drug metaphor: emptiness purges itself along with all other theories.

One might object that the "and so forth" (*ādayaḥ*) after "eternality"

(*śāsvatā*) adds "nihilism" (*ucchedavāda*) as the single other type of view that emptiness makes impossible; perhaps one still might accept a view of the middle way. However, this route is blocked by the final verse: "I bow to him, Gautama, who, by means of compassion, taught the true *dharma* for the purpose of abandoning all views" (MMK 27.30).[41] Here we should understand the true *dharma* as a practice that has the purpose of abandoning all views, as opposed to the *dharma* that the Buddha did not teach in MMK 25.24, which is *dharma* in the sense of a particular view or set of views. The major debate about MMK 27.30 has long been about whether "all views" (*sarvadṛṣṭi*) indicates all views whatsoever, or merely all *false* views, as is commonly suggested by many Indian, Tibetan, and Western commentators.[42] I think we should take Nāgārjuna at his word.[43] My interpretation allows us to take Nāgārjuna literally in both phases; we need not ignore or downplay the significance of either. Reading Nāgārjuna as a skeptic about philosophy allows us to see a certain unity in his thought without attributing to him either too little or too much. Skepticism is just right.[44]

2.5 Nāgārjuna's Development of Early Buddhist Quietism: Religiosity without Belief

An incredulous reader may object that Nāgārjuna could not possibly be a Buddhist philosopher if he is a skeptic in the sense I am claiming. Could any interpretation that is insufficiently related to Buddhist soteriological goals of gaining knowledge of the true nature of reality be anything but completely off-track, especially if it concerns such an important philosopher in the Buddhist tradition? One might also object that Nāgārjuna could not be religious in any meaningful sense if his goal is to eliminate all beliefs of a philosophical or religious nature.

The first objection is that my interpretation neglects Buddhist goals of insight into the true nature of reality and other features of the Buddhist tradition such as Right View as one of the elements of the Eightfold Path. Perhaps no Buddhist can be a skeptic of the sort I am claiming since a Buddhist must aim for some liberating knowledge or correct views. It is probably the persistence of this sort of objection that makes it difficult for many readers to take Nāgārjuna's expressions of positionlessness seriously and which leads them to suggest that anti-realist conclusions or mystical apprehension are what it is that liberated Nāgārjunian Buddhists come to know.

My response is that the two phases of Nāgārjuna's philosophical practice are representations of two tendencies within early Buddhism that I discussed in the previous chapter (section 1.4): the analysis-insight and quietist tendencies. According to Steven Collins,

> One approach to the attainment of the "emptiness" of *nibbāna*, naturally, was a direct assault on any form of conceptualization, any view whatsoever. . . . The other approach . . . was to proceed through an analysis of what does have conceptual content, in order to classify it into known categories; the ability to classify any experience or concept into a known, non-valued impersonal category was held to be a technique for avoiding desire for the object thus classified. (Collins 1982, 113)

According to this second tendency, which was developed most thoroughly in the Abhidharma schools, the purpose of Buddhism is to decrease suffering through analysis of and insight into the true nature of reality. The quietist tendency, on the other hand, "seeks to attain as its final goal a state of beatific 'inner quiet'" (Collins 1982, 139). Similarly, Paul Fuller articulates two main ways of understanding the role of views (*diṭṭhi*) in early Buddhism: the opposition understanding, in which right views are opposed to wrong views, and the no-view understanding, in which one aims to avoid all views (Fuller 2005).[45]

My skeptical interpretation reveals Nāgārjuna's innovation in bringing these two tendencies together: phase one incorporates the analysis-insight tendency, and phase two incorporates the quietist tendency. Nāgārjuna transforms what was a somewhat uneasy dichotomy within the earlier tradition into a cohesive dialectical practice: he demonstrates that the practice of analysis, when pursued all the way to emptiness, can be used as a means of pacifying conceptualization. Thus, Nāgārjuna is, while a reformer and innovator, working within Buddhist parameters by synchronizing two seemingly disparate strands of early Buddhist philosophy.[46]

The second objection is more general: how could a skeptic be religious in any meaningful sense? One of the few noncontroversial facts about Nāgārjuna is that he is a Buddhist philosopher. As such, one would expect his writings to have a religious purpose, such as the philosophical elucidation of Buddhist religious beliefs or a defense of Buddhist practices.

I have answered this objection in more depth elsewhere along with a comparison of the treatment of religious practice by Sextus Empiricus (Mills 2018a), but the basic idea is this: my skeptical interpretation of Nāgārjuna understands the program of purging oneself of philosophical views as a way of working toward the

Buddhist goal of non-attachment, a remedy particularly appropriate for intellectuals prone to grasping at theories. Nāgārjuna should be understood as offering a quietist Buddhist practice, one that employs analytical methods but does not ultimately have as its goal the acceptance of any belief.

A skeptical Nāgārjunian might even participate in Buddhist religious rituals without affirming any beliefs. Sextus Empiricus expresses a similar attitude when he says that Pyrrhonians can engage in religious rituals and be pious toward the gods without having any religious beliefs.[47] Many religious practitioners would find it odd, or perhaps even offensive, to engage in a religious practice without affirming belief in the tenets of that religion, but as Harald Thorsrud suggests, for Pyrrhonians religion is a kind of behavior rather than a kind of belief (Thorsrud 2009, 190).

Religious philosophers generally see skepticism as a threat, particularly if we are unable to obtain knowledge about religious matters such as the existence of God, the afterlife, and so forth. Contemporary philosophers such as William Alston have maintained that externalist, reliabilist accounts of knowledge answer religious skepticism by showing that theology could be an autonomous, reliable belief-forming mechanism that yields knowledge of God (Alston 1992). On the contrary, Nāgārjuna might say that a Buddhist could embrace skepticism as a means of destroying dogmatic attachment. Nāgārjuna does not engage in systematic theory building aiming at the preservation of religious knowledge. His practice does not rest on knowledge claims or beliefs, but rather the elimination of the types of knowledge claims and beliefs that provide the foundation for most religions, including most forms of Buddhism. Once one relinquishes certain general assumptions about Buddhism and religion, Nāgārjuna's status as a Buddhist skeptic becomes clear.

Nāgārjuna's religiosity without belief may not make sense in the context of religious traditions more explicitly tied to the acceptance of a creed. Yet it makes sense in a certain type of Buddhist context as a development of early Buddhist quietism. This is why my skeptical interpretation should not be understood as a form of skeptical fideism, or the idea that skepticism is a means to the acquisition of faith in the sense of a belief not subjected to rational evaluation. Unlike skeptical fideists such as Michel de Montaigne[48], Nāgārjuna is not "annihilating his intellect to make room for faith" (Montaigne 1987, 74). Instead, he engages in philosophical destruction to bring about mental quietude, the absence of any faith or belief.[49] I realize this is an unusual mode of religiosity, but then there is little that is ordinary about a philosopher like Nāgārjuna. He would, I think, counsel us not to rely too much on our preconceived notions about what religious practice

should be. Nāgārjuna's work ought to encourage a rethinking of our contemporary conceptions of religiosity, which is one reason that contemporary philosophers of religion ought to study the work of this difficult ancient philosopher.

2.6 Other Historical Precedents: Candrakīrti, Kumārajīva, Khedrupjey's Opponent, and Patsab Nyimadrak

I hope to have provided some evidence that Nāgārjuna was developing the tendency of early Buddhist quietism. In particular, early Buddhist quietism gives a framework in which it becomes possible to understand Nāgārjuna's statements that his ultimate intention is not to support a view (e.g., MMK 13.8, 27.30). There are also specific influences. For instance, in MMK 24.11 Nāgārjuna refers to a misinterpretation of emptiness as being like a snake wrongly grasped, a clear reference to the metaphor of the water snake in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 1.134).

Just as Nāgārjuna was responding to earlier traditions, so has he become a source for later scholars, Buddhist, and non-Buddhist, classical and contemporary. While agreement with a famous commentator is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a good philosophical interpretation of a Buddhist text (commentators can make mistakes, too), the fact that there are some precedents for skeptical interpretations of Nāgārjuna is historically interesting in that it demonstrates continuity within Buddhist traditions. Before moving on to the other two pillars of Indian skepticism about philosophy, it is worth noting some of the ways in which Nāgārjuna has been taken up by later philosophers leaning in a quietist, skeptical direction. While skeptical interpretations of Nāgārjuna have seldom been popular, they have been a persistent minority within classical Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan traditions.

I've already discussed Candrakīrti's commentary on the notion of the cessation of conceptual proliferation in MMK 25.24 of Nāgārjuna's MMK. His commentary on this verse constitutes an excellent description of phase two of Nāgārjuna's procedure. Elsewhere (Mills 2016a) I have argued that Candrakīrti's arguments against the epistemological and logical theories of Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE) and disagreement with Bhāvaviveka (c. sixth century CE) on whether Dignāga's form of reasoning is appropriate for Mādhyamikas should be seen as a refusal of any variety of epistemology, rather than any

endorsement of some alternative Madhyamaka epistemology of an anti-realist, contextualist variety.[50]

When Kumārajīva transmitted Madhyamaka to China in the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE, he may have brought with him a skeptical understanding of Nāgārjuna. According to Richard Robinson, Kumārajīva "rejected all notions of existent and nonexistent, while maintaining that the negation of these notions was simply a therapeutic device" (Robinson 1967, 95). His student, Sengzhao, says, "The Holy Mind is void and still" and, "*Prajñā* is devoid of the marks of arising and ceasing, devoid of all marks of existing things. It has no thing that is known and no thing that it sees" (Robinson 1967, 126, 124).[51] Kevin Sullivan refers to Kumārajīva's attitude as "religious pragmatism," because the role of emptiness is purely soteriological rather than descriptive (Sullivan 1988, 98–100). Although Kumārajīva and Sengzhao's texts could possibly be construed in mystical terms, they share some affinity with my skeptical interpretation in their use of negation to cultivate stillness of mind.

The Tibetan tradition contains perhaps the clearest historical precedents for my variety of skeptical interpretation. The *Great Digest* of the fifteenth-century philosopher Khedrupjey contains a section refuting an opponent who claims, "The Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas have no system of their own, no belief, and nothing at all that they accept" (Cabezón 1992, 257). The opponent here would seem to be expressing a skeptical interpretation, and Khedrupjey does a thorough, Geluk job of trying to demolish this interpretation (Cabezón 1992, 256–272).

The clearest precedent for my sort of skeptical interpretation is the twelfth-century philosopher Patsab Nyimadrak. According to Dreyfus, Patsab has the following attitude:

> Mādhyamikas do not have any thesis to establish, view to defend, or position to eliminate about how things really are. They merely proceed by consequences exposing the contradictions to which the views of their adversaries lead. Mādhyamikas are not in the game of demonstrating the truth or falsity of claims about how things are. (Dreyfus 2011, 99)

Like Sextus, Patsab conceives of his philosophical practice as therapy and aims for a tranquil mental state. However, Patsab does not use the Pyrrhonian method of demonstrating that two opposing theses are equal in their convincingness and unconvincingness. Rather, he uses the *prasaṅga* method, which Tibetan philosophers identified with Candrakīrti in opposition to Bhāviveka's *svātantra* method. In this method, Mādhyamikas demonstrate the incoherence, and hence unconvincingness, of all views on a subject.

Patsab also rules out any place for means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) in Madhyamaka. He sees Buddhist notions like the two truths as therapeutic devices to be used in a practice of undermining views (Dreyfus 2011, 104). Unlike a mystic, he does not accept that emptiness itself can be an object of inference or perception, even of the "yogic" variety; to do so would make emptiness into an object, and any such alleged "object" disappears under analysis (Dreyfus 2011, 98–99; 104–105). To use my language of the two phases, Patsab is saying that the Buddhist tropes of phase one—the two truths, dependent origination, even emptiness itself—led eventually to the goal of phase two—"the abandoning of all views" (MMK 27.30). Patsab describes this as "wisdom." However, as Dreyfus explains, "This wisdom is not a cognitively active state engaged in figuring particular objects but, rather, is the cessation of any attempt to cognize reality" (Dreyfus 2011, 105). In seeking the complete cessation of any attempt to know or apprehend reality, Patsab's interpretation is the closest historical analogue to my own skeptical interpretation.

This historical interlude shows that my sort of skeptical reading of Nāgārjuna is not without some resonance within Buddhist traditions. It has been an uncommon reading because, of the two main tendencies going back to early Buddhism, the analysis-insight tendency has always been stronger than the skeptical, quietist tendency. Nonetheless, the skeptical, quietist tendency has a long historical pedigree, one that I will demonstrate in the upcoming chapters is itself part of a larger tradition of skepticism about philosophy in classical India.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun my treatment of the classical era of Indian philosophy with the first pillar of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy: Nāgārjuna. After explaining the strengths and weaknesses of mystical and anti-realist interpretations, I set forth my own skeptical interpretation as a way to make sense of the apparent tension between Nāgārjuna's promotion of the thesis of emptiness and his frequent denial that his purpose is to promote any view at all. On my interpretation, Nāgārjuna's procedure works in two phases, each in line with one of the two main tendencies of early Buddhist philosophy: in phase one he argues for the view of emptiness and against other views, while in phase two he demonstrates that this view undermines itself as well, leaving a thorough Nāgārjunian Buddhist with no views or theses.

While this has not always been a popular view of Nāgārjuna, either in classical or contemporary times, I have argued that my interpretation is compatible with Nāgārjuna's status as a Buddhist religious philosopher, especially if it is seen as his development of the attitude of early Buddhist quietism discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, there have been historical precedents for my interpretation in Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

Having set out the general framework of my interpretation of Nāgārjuna as a skeptic about philosophy, in the next chapter I will show how this interpretation makes sense of his specific arguments concerning theories of causation. Since this is a topic of enduring philosophical concern that has encouraged a fair share of dogmatic attachment, views concerning causation are understandably some of Nāgārjuna's primary targets as a skeptic about philosophy.

NOTES

1. In this and subsequent chapters all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. See Wood (1994) and Burton (1999) for nihilist interpretations, Magliola (1984) for a Derridean deconstructive reading, Huntington (2007) for an irrationalist reading, Arnold (2005) for a transcendental metaphysical reading, McGagney (1997) for a reading of Nāgārjuna as advocating a position of philosophical openness, Gandolfo (2016) for an interpretation of philosophical deflationism, and Kalupahana (1986) for an empiricist reading in which Nāgārjuna is not a Mahāyāna Buddhist, but rather seeking a return to the Buddha's original message. I will discuss mystical, anti-realist, and skeptical interpretations in more detail in the body of this chapter. For historical overviews of Madhyamaka as well as issues about Nāgārjuna's authorship, see Williams (1989, Ch. 3), Ruegg (1981), Westerhoff (2009, Ch. 1), and Siderits and Katsura (2013, Introduction). While Nāgārjuna's authorship of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is "taken to be true by definition" (Westerhoff 2009, 6), note that the attribution of the VV to Nāgārjuna has been doubted by Tola and Dragonetti (1998), although most scholars continue to regard it as an authentic work.

3. *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe/ sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā//* MMK 24.18. This single verse has spawned a cottage industry among Nāgārjuna scholars. A good place to start is Berger (2010).

4. *sarvadṛṣṭiprahānāya yaḥ saddharmam adeśyat/ anukampām upādāya taṃ namasyāmi gautamaṃ//* MMK 27.30.

5. Abraham Vélez de Cea (2006) critiques mystical interpretations (including those of Murti and Abe), although he focuses on scholars such as James L. Fredericks who compare Nāgārjuna to the Christian mystic St. John of the Cross. Nonetheless Vélez de Cea sees the concepts of emptiness in Nāgārjuna and John of the Cross as performing a similar ethical function.

6. Somewhat less-developed versions of mystical interpretations can also be found in Grenier (1970, 75) and King-Farlow (1992, 21).

7. While James's characterization of mysticism remains the most influential, others are worth mentioning. Bertrand Russell sees mysticism as "little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe" (Russell 1925, 3). Robert Gimello adds characterizations such as, "A feeling of oneness . . . A strong confidence in the 'reality' or 'objectivity' of the experience . . . A cessation of *normal* intellectual operations" (Gimello 1978, 178). Stace (1960) concludes that "mysticism" ought to be treated as a family resemblance term, and he includes insightful discussions of the thesis that the content of mystical experiences is everywhere the same, the objectivity of mystical experiences, and the relation to mystical experience to logic and language.

8. *sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ/na kva cit kasyacit kaścit dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ* // MMK 25.24.

9. Siderits (2000) focuses on metaphysical anti-realism, while Siderits (2007) focuses on semantic anti-realism, or as he calls it there, "semantic non-dualism . . . there is only one kind of truth" (Siderits 2007, 182).

10. See Siderits (2007, 202–203) for an argument that this statement is not paradoxical.

11. Matilal's leap from skepticism to mysticism is seen here: "The sceptic's argumentation, through constant practice, is supposed to lead one to an *insight* into the nature of what is ultimately real (*prajñā*). This transition from radical scepticism to some sort of mysticism . . . is very pronounced in the Indian tradition" (Matilal 2004, 67). Matilal's mystical elements perhaps incline Siderits to characterize this interpretation as accepting the existence of mind-independent reality. However, Siderits takes Matilal to be putting forward something much closer to Cartesian skepticism than Matilal intended (Siderits 2000, 17).

12. For my review of Kuzminski's (2008) book, which includes more in-depth criticism, see Mills (2011).

13. For a helpful discussion of the differences between Garfield and Burton with regard to Hellenistic skepticism, see Arnold (2005, 131–142). See also Burton (1999, Ch. 2), Dreyfus (2011), and Dreyfus and Garfield (2011).

14. In discussing Burton and Garfield, Arnold notes that they disagree most fundamentally about what they think it means to be skeptical in the first place: Burton takes the lack of any truth-claim or knowledge claim as the key feature of skepticism and Garfield is more interested in Madhyamaka as skeptical therapy for dogmatists (Arnold 2004, 137).

15. Matilal also discusses this *prasajya* negation in Matilal (1971, 162–165).

16. Dreyfus notes a similar inconsistency in Matilal's interpretation (Dreyfus 2011, 92–93).

17. Patsab is a precursor of my own interpretation, as I will discuss in the section 2.6.

18. While much of my interpretation of the MMK also applies to Nāgārjuna's other texts and to Candrakīrti, I will not discuss other Mādhyamikas in the Indian and Tibetan traditions whom I readily admit are mostly non-skeptics. Bhāvaviveka claims that Mādhyamikas have positive theses that can be put into Dignāga's logical forms (Ames 1993). Tsongkhapa develops interesting theories about what makes conventional truth true and makes truth-claims about truth and existence along the way. Tsongkhapa, like other Geluk commenters including Khedrupjey, is even critical of a skeptical approach (for more on Tsongkhapa on these points, see Newland 2011). Furthermore, Tsongkhapa and Khedrupjey interpret the "all views" in MMK 27.30 to mean "all false views" rather than all views as such (Garfield 2002, 47). While Candrakīrti is often read in a more "constructive" vein

(e.g., Dreyfus and Garfield 2011, 126–130), I think Candrakīrti's seemingly constructive elements are purely therapeutic (see Mills 2016a).

19. For more specific critiques of Murti, see Sullivan (1988, 96–98) and Hayes (1994, 333–337).

20. *aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcair aprapañcitaṃ/nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇaṃ//* MMK 18.9.One could take this verse as supplying a "characteristic of reality" (*tattvasya lakṣaṇaṃ*) for use in Nāgārjuna's arguments against self (*ātman*), rather than a positive characterization of mystical experience.

21. *amātraś-caturtho 'vyavahāryaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivo 'dvaita evam-oṃkāra ātmaiva saṃviśatyātmanā "tmānaṃ ya evaṃ veda.* MU 12.

22. *vitarāga-bhaya-krodhair-munibhir-veda-pāragaiḥ/nirvikalpo hy-ayaṃ dṛṣṭaḥ prapañcopaśamo 'dvayaḥ // ĀŚ* 2.35 //

23. Must Gauḍapāda and Nāgārjuna have more similarities since they use many of the same terms, such as the unproduced (*ajāti*)? What they do with these terms is quite different, especially regarding the word "*prapañca*," which means "phenomenal world" for Gauḍapāda and "conceptual proliferation" for Nāgārjuna. For more on similarities between Gauḍapāda and Nāgārjuna, see Mills (2010) and King (1995).

24. In the *Visuddhimagga* (*Path of Purification*), the Theravāda philosopher Buddhaghosa (c. fifth century) says that concentration is intended to reduce distraction (VM 3.4).

25. According to Buddhaghosa the function of insight is to remove delusion (VM 14.5).

26. See Mills (2004), where I agree with Gimello and others that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are equal yet distinct partners in Buddhist meditation practices.

27. Mark Siderits (personal communication) informed me that he sees anti-realism more as an attitude than a theory, a move that might avoid the problems I address here. Still, I see a greater affinity between Nāgārjuna and Hellenistic Pyrrhonism than contemporary anti-realism insofar as anti-realism is presented as an overtly theoretical view. Also, skepticism about philosophy is a better way to understand Nāgārjuna's development of early Buddhist quietism.

28. *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnāṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ/yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādṛṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire//* MMK 13.8.

29. This self-referential contradiction is inspired by what Garfield and Priest (2002) call the paradox of ontology. For my argument that a thesis of universal emptiness could not be established epistemically, see Mills (2016a, 53–54). Alternatively, one might follow Garfield and Priest (2002) by taking the self-referential contradiction in paraconsistent terms according to which there are some true contradictions. While I think Garfield and Priest have correctly uncovered the self-referential contradiction lurking within a thesis of universal emptiness, I see no textual basis for attributing paraconsistent logic to Nāgārjuna, and in any case I don't think anything as exotic as paraconsistent logic is required to make sense of Nāgārjuna. To press the problems for any thesis of emptiness a bit further, consider this *prasaṅga* argument of my own: Is anti-realism true or false? If it is false, then we can dismiss it. If it is true, then is it true under some conceptual description or under no conceptual description? If it is true under no conceptual description, then there is one thing, anti-realism itself, which is true outside of our purposes, intentions, and so forth. Then anti-realism takes a realist theory with regard to its own truth, and there is one counterexample to universal anti-realism: the truth of anti-realism itself. If anti-realism is true under some conceptual description, under *which* description? Its own? Then it's begging the

question. Under philosophical analysis in general? But why do some respectable philosophers uphold realism? Under *proper* philosophical analysis? But this is anti-realism itself, which is again question begging. Therefore, anti-realism cannot be established.

30. See MMK 5.8, 13.8, 25.24, and 27.30. See also 18.5, 21.17, and 24.7.

31. See NS 2.1.12–1 3 where a Nāgārjuna-style argument against *pramāṇas* is rejected as self-contradictory. For more on this section and its relation to the VV, see Oetke (1991). Additionally, self-refutation is the first objection Khedrupjey presents against his skeptical opponent (Cabezón 1992, 258).

32. Pyrrhonian responses to inconsistency objections are a matter of scholarly dispute, particularly as to whether Sextus's response to this objection at PH 1.13 should be read as Sextus admitting to having some non-philosophical beliefs or whether he is saying he has no beliefs at all. For more on this dispute, see Hankinson (1995), Burnyeat and Frede (1997), Thorsrud (2009), and Vogt (2012).

33. For my skeptical interpretation of the VV, particularly the critique of epistemology at 31–51, see Mills (2016).

34. This metaphor appears in the *Kāśyapaparivarta Sūtra*, section 65 (Siderits and Katsura 2013, 145). Many authors (including Candrakīrti himself) cite the source as the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra* (e.g., Sprung 1979, 150–151), which in existing Chinese and Tibetan canons is a collection of 49 *sūtras*, one of which is the *Kāśyapaparivarta Sūtra* (see Pedersen 1980).

35. Interestingly, the metaphor of the purgative drug is used by Sextus Empiricus to explain the function of argumentative language for Pyrrhonian skeptics (PH 1.206). Gowans (2010) is an interesting comparison of medical metaphors in Buddhist and Hellenistic philosophy.

36. *sarveśām prapañcānāṃ nimittānāṃ ya upaśamo 'pravṛttis tān nirvāṇam. . . . vācām apravṛtter vā prapañcopaśamaś cittasya apravṛtteḥ śivaḥ.* PP 236.

37. Perhaps Nāgārjuna did not mean that one should stop thinking altogether, but simply that peace results when one stops grasping at cognitions and concepts. Also, maybe *nirvāṇa* is not as otherworldly as it is often taken to be. As the contemporary Thai monk Buddhadāsa puts it, "in Dhamma language, *nibbāna* is the complete and utter extinction of *dukkha* right here and now" (Buddhadāsa 1988, 26).

38. I prefer "pacification" instead of "cessation," because the root "*śam*" means not only "cessation" but "to become tired . . . be quiet or calm or satisfied or contented" (Monier-Williams 1994, 1053). Also, the Sanskrit etymology resonates with the Latin root of "pacification," which is "*pax*" (peace). More importantly, "*śam*" is the root for "*śamatha*" (tranquility), which is the Sanskrit name for the Pāli *samatha*, which I discussed earlier as one of the forms of meditation recognized by Buddhists, the other being insight (Pāli: *vipassanā*, Sanskrit: *vipaśyana*). This connotation would likely have been obvious to Nāgārjuna and his Buddhist readers.

39. *atha vā sarvabhāvānāṃ śūnyatvāc chāśvatādayaḥ/kva kasya katamāḥ saṃbhaviṣyanti dṛṣṭayaḥ//* MMK 27.29.

40. Candrakīrti uses the phrase "emptiness of emptiness" in *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.186 (see Huntington and Wangchen 1989, 186). It is also frequently discussed by modern scholars (e.g., Huntington and Wangchen 1989; Garfield 2002; Siderits and Katsura 2013, etc.). While I am indebted to many of these scholars, the understanding of the emptiness of emptiness I develop here is my own. Garfield, for instance, often understands the emptiness of emptiness as part of a somewhat anti-realist framework involving ideas about the importance of context and

perspectives (e.g., Garfield 2002, Ch. 3), whereas I see the emptiness of emptiness as a vital step within Nāgārjuna's purely therapeutic, quietist aims.

41. *sarvadṛṣṭiprahānāya yaḥ saddharmam adeśyat/anukampām upādāya taṃ namasyāmi gautamaṃ*// MMK 27.30.

42. Proponents of the "false views" translation note that *dṛṣṭi* often has a negative connotation of "a wrong view" (Monier-Williams 1994, 492), although it can also have a positive connotation in the sense of Right View (*samyag dṛṣṭi*) as part of the Eightfold Path. While it's possible that Nāgārjuna meant "wrong views," it is also possible he meant views in general. An appeal to the text cannot settle this dispute. My point is that it is possible to take "*dṛṣṭi*" as meaning all views. Thus, a major reason in favor of the "false views" translation—that the text cannot make sense otherwise—is simply not the case.

43. In this I agree with Garfield in his agreement with Ngog and the Nying-ma school (Garfield 2002, 46–68).

44. One might wonder how my interpretation differs from Stefano Gandolfo's (2016) interpretation of Nāgārjuna as a weak philosophical deflationist or dequietist. According to Gandolfo, Nāgārjuna is offering "a meta- and ultimately non-philosophical evaluation of philosophy" (Gandolfo 2016, 208). While I agree with him on several issues, especially on Nāgārjuna's attitude toward philosophy, I do not understand Gandolfo's rejection of a therapeutic understanding of Nāgārjuna (226–227). Nor do I see how Gandolfo's supposed non-philosophical conventional statement about philosophy could avoid the dilemma of either turning out to be a species of global anti-realism (*à la* Siderits and Westerhoff) or undermining itself. Can one critique philosophy without doing philosophy? While Gandolfo seems to say yes, my inclination is to say no, which is precisely why Nāgārjuna's philosophical statements undermine themselves.

45. Fuller focuses on modern interpretations that seek to discover a single attitude toward views in early Buddhism, whereas Collins and I see the tradition as containing both attitudes. Fuller argues against both the opposition and no-view understandings: "the opposition understanding is challenged because there is not an opposition between wrong-view and right-view as incorrect and correct truth claims but an opposition between craving and the cessation of craving. . . . The rejection of all view is not being advised, but the abandoning of craving and attachment to views. . . . The early texts do not reject knowledge, but attachment to knowledge" (Fuller 2005, 8). Fuller argues for the "transcendence of views," which is a "different order of seeing" in which right view "apprehends how things are *and* is a remedy for craving" (Fuller 2005, 157).

46. Since the Abhidharma schools generally championed the analysis-insight tendency, there is a sense in which Nāgārjuna's quietism was a return to an element of pre-Abhidharma traditions. Yet this is not quite in the sense of Kalupahana (1986), because it's more proper to say that Nāgārjuna was combining quietism with the analysis-insight tendency as it existed in both early Buddhism and Abhidharma traditions.

47. For instance, at PH 3.3. For a short but illuminating discussion of the Pyrrhonist attitude toward religious practice, see Thorsrud (2009, 188–190).

48. Whether Montaigne is a fideist is controversial, but I maintain that it makes sense of the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. For a discussion of the dispute see M. A. Screech's introduction in Montaigne (1987).

49. Some readers might compare Nāgārjuna to non-realist or Wittgensteinian approaches in philosophy of religion. Non-realism in philosophy of religion is the view that religious beliefs do not refer to non-observable phenomena (God, karma, etc.), but are expressions of attitudes or part of rituals. D. Z. Phillips, representing

Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, claims that attention to the grammar of religious beliefs rules out both realism and non-realism—realism because it neglects context and non-realism because it neglects that religious beliefs are *about* something (Phillips 1993, Ch. 4; see also Mulhall 2001). Non-realist and Wittgensteinian approaches concern the meaning of religious beliefs. My skeptical interpretation of Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, denies that Nāgārjunian skeptics would hold such beliefs.

50. See PP 20. Bhāvaviveka's arguments can be found in Ames (1993). The clearest proponent of a form of positive Madhyamaka epistemology is Westerhoff (2010).

51. These are Robinson's translations, or as he calls them "restatements" (Robinson 1967, 101).

Chapter 3

Nāgārjuna and the Cause of Skepticism

> *Not from itself, nor even from another, nor from both, nor even from no cause, are any arisen beings found anywhere at all.*
>
> —*Nāgārjuna*,
> Mūlamadhyamakakārikā *1.1*

In the previous chapter I gave a general characterization of my interpretation of Nāgārjuna as a skeptic about philosophy according to which his philosophical procedure operates in two phases: one in which he defends a thesis of emptiness and a second in which he demonstrates that this thesis undermines itself along with all other views. In this chapter I turn to two specific topics within Nāgārjuna's *corpus*.

The thesis of this chapter is that the interpretation developed in the previous chapter can make sense of Nāgārjuna's arguments about two core areas of philosophy: epistemology and metaphysics. After a brief tour of Nāgārjuna's arguments about epistemology in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV), I will make a case study of Nāgārjuna's famous arguments against causal theories presented in chapter one of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK). This will show that skepticism about philosophy makes for a coherent interpretation of Nāgārjuna's arguments and their place in the overall text, one that is superior to competing interpretations such as conventionalism, anti-realism, and epistemological skepticism.[1] I end with reflections on how this chapter demonstrates some of the specific ways in which Nāgārjuna developed a form of skepticism about philosophy by combining the two main tendencies of earlier Buddhist traditions: analysis-insight and quietism.

3.1 An Overview of Nāgārjuna's Argumentative

Strategies

In the previous chapter I referred a lot to Nāgārjuna's arguments against essence (*svabhāva*) and in favor of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), but I said relatively little about what precisely these arguments are or what forms they take. I will discuss specific arguments in the remainder of this chapter, but first it is helpful to say a bit about a few of Nāgārjuna's favorite kinds of arguments.[2]

Nāgārjuna's primary method of argument is a form called *prasaṅga*. I translate this as "unwanted consequence," noting the word's etymology from the verbal root *prasaṅj*, "to be attached to." In a typical *prasaṅga* argument, an assumption is put forward that implies several possible options for theories or interpretations (these options are sometimes called *vikalpas*). Each *vikalpa* is shown to either contain internal contradictions or to be inconsistent with the opponent's other commitments. The arguer then concludes with a denial of the original assumption. The structure of a *prasaṅga* looks like this (although there can be fewer or more than three options/*vikalpas*):

If A, then *x*, *y*, or *z*.
Not *x*.
Not *y*.
Not *z*.
Therefore, A is denied.

While *prasaṅga* arguments are structurally similar to reductio ad absurdum arguments in Western logic, there are two main differences. First, in a *prasaṅga,* the denials of the options (*vikalpas*—*x*, *y*, and *z* above) need not be based on strict logical inconsistency. They can be based on inconsistency with the opponent's other tenets. They are problems *for the opponent*; hence, the "unwanted consequence" or "attachment." Second, the final denial does not imply the acceptance of the alternative theory: denying theory A does not imply the acceptance of theory not-A. Instead, the conclusion of a *prasaṅga* argument is typically what is known by the etymologically related term *prasajya* negation, which is a "commitmentless denial" or "illocutionary negation" opposed to a *paryudāsa* negation or "propositional negation" (Matilal 1986, 66).[3] In the stock example, "this is a non-brahmin" is a *paryudāsa* negation while "it is not the case that this is a brahmin" is a *prasajya* negation. The first type of negation implies the existence of a person who is of another class, while the second denies the entire sentence and does not imply the presence of a person at all.[4]

As we will see in this chapter, Nāgārjuna uses a *prasaṅga* form to

deny five possible options for establishing the means of knowledge as well as four possible options for theories of causation (the latter is also another famous argument form called a *catuṣkoṭi*, which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.3). Jayarāśi's labyrinthine *prasaṅgas* concerning epistemology—with their *vikalpas* within *vikalpas*—will be discussed in chapter 5; Śrī Harṣa's *prasaṅga* against the Nyāya contention that participating in a debate implies the acceptance of the means of knowledge will be a major part of chapter 7.

Another of Nāgārjuna's favorite argument types is often called the argument of the three times, which could be considered to be a specific subtype of *prasaṅga*. This argument form begins with an opponent's positing of a relation (often a causal relation) between two things. Then it is asked whether this relation takes place in the past, present, or future. It is demonstrated that the relation cannot take place in any of the three times, and in the conclusion, the original posit is rejected. This form can be found in MMK 1.5–7 (to be discussed in section 3.3) as well as in the *Nyāya Sūtra*, the foundational text of the competing Brahmanical Nyāya school.[5]

More fine-tuned instruments in Nāgārjuna's argumentative tool box include demonstrating that an opponent's thesis implies an infinite regress (*anavasthā*), circularity (*cakraka*), or mutual dependence (*anyonāśraya*), or—even worse—that it should be accepted with no cause (*ahetu*) or for no reason at all (*akasmāt*). All of these are often embedded within a larger *prasaṅga* structure and applied to specific options. Again, it should be noted that these are intended to be problems for Nāgārjuna's opponent. They do not imply the acceptance of any particular theory on Nāgārjuna's part.

3.2 Brief Tour of Arguments Concerning the Means of Knowledge in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*

Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*Overturning the Objections*; hereafter, VV) is an engagement with an imagined opponent, most likely a member of the Brahmanical Nyāya school.[6] This text begins with a series of objections from the imagined opponent on the coherence of concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) followed by Nāgārjuna's replies; Nāgārjuna's most explicit treatment of the means of knowledge *(pramāṇas)* can be found among these objections and replies. Near the beginning of the text, the imagined Naiyāyika (follower of Nyāya) raises an objection: if the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) are empty of essence, they cannot yield knowledge; thus Nāgārjuna cannot give an epistemologically sound reason to believe that all things lack essences (VV 5–6). The thesis itself takes away the means by which

the thesis can be supported; it saws off the branch on which it is sitting.

Nāgārjuna responds to this objection in VV 30–51. In verse 30, Nāgārjuna denies that he is trying to apprehend anything through perception, inference, or any other means of knowledge, and thus the Nyāya objection is off base, since the opponent is accusing him of not being able to do something he was never trying to do in the first place. Nāgārjuna then launches into a critique of the means of knowledge in verse 31. This section ends with a conclusion in verse 51, which constitutes a rejection of five options for establishing the *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge): "The *pramāṇas* are not established from themselves, nor from one another, nor by other kinds of *pramāṇas*, nor by the *prameyas* (objects of knowledge), nor even without any reason at all" (VV 51).[7]

Given this conclusion, I take the argument of VV 31–51 as a *prasaṅga* argument with five options, each of which is denied. Here is a gloss of the argument.

Option One: Perhaps the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) are established by other means of knowledge (verse 31). However, this leads to an infinite regress (*anavasthā*) (verse 32).

Option Two: Since the previous option will not work (verse 33), perhaps the *pramāṇas* establish themselves, just as fire illuminates both itself and other things (verse 34). But this is mistaken, since fire should not be seen as illuminating itself (verses 34–39).[8] Furthermore, if the *pramāṇas* establish themselves, they would not be related to the *prameyas* (objects of knowledge) (verses 40 and 41).

Option Three: Perhaps *pramāṇas* are established by *prameyas* (verse 42). In that case a *pramāṇa* is unnecessary since the *prameya* is already established (verses 43 and 44), the proper order by which a *pramāṇa* establishes a *prameya* is reversed (verse 45), and circularity ensues (verses 46–48). This would be as if the son were produced by the father and the father by the son (verses 49 and 50). Because of this puzzle, Nāgārjuna says, "we are in doubt" (verse 50).[9]

Option Four: Perhaps the *pramāṇas* are established by *pramāṇas* of similar or different types, for example, a single perception is established by another perception, perception is established by inference, and so forth (this option appears in the commentary to verse 51). However, this option would lead either to an infinite regress (as in option one) or circularity (as in option three).

Option Five: Perhaps the *pramāṇas* could be established without any reason at all (this is also mentioned in the commentary to verse 51).

Yet this option will not satisfy any aspiring epistemologists, because it gives absolutely no explanation for how the *pramāṇas* are established.[10]

I want to reiterate that this is a *prasaṅga* argument. Nāgārjuna examines and rejects each of these five options. Having identified the structure of the argument, we can move next to understanding the purpose of the argument.

Jan Westerhoff, a prominent defender of an anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna, claims the purpose of VV 30–51 is to argue in favor of a positive epistemological theory: "an epistemological theory that incorporates empty epistemic instruments" (Westerhoff 2010, 69), one that promotes contextualism and the rejection of foundationalism (Westerhoff 2010, 82). Westerhoff even sees VV 48 as expressing a coherence theory of justification as a contextually bound, dependently originated interplay between initial assumptions and the coherence of a body of beliefs. There is no room for a realist correspondence between our beliefs and mind-independent reality, and the concept of "mind-independent reality" ceases to be coherent in an anti-realist vein.

I see little textual basis for attributing any coherentist, contextualist, or anti-realist epistemology to Nāgārjuna in the VV, nor is such a theory needed to make sense of the text. The above section is a *prasaṅga* argument that offers no positive conclusion, and Nāgārjuna never gives such a theory elsewhere. Instead, I agree with Matilal, who claims that Nāgārjuna "called in question . . . the very concept of *pramāṇa* . . . he developed a very strong and devastating critique of the whole epistemological enterprise itself" (Matilal 1986, 49).

Recall my interpretation from the previous chapter according to which Nāgārjuna's philosophical practice consists of two phases: phase one is to argue in favor of a thesis of emptiness, while phase two is for demonstrating that this thesis undermines itself along with all others, leaving a thorough Nāgārjunian in a state of mental peace beyond conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*). Realism in ontology and epistemology is one means to dogmatic attachment. However, realism is not the only means to attachment. One could become attached to emptiness itself (as explained in MMK 13.8). How can attributing a positive view of anti-realism or contextualism to Nāgārjuna avoid encouraging attachment to emptiness itself?

More specifically, it is difficult to see how a contextualist, empty epistemology would not be skewered on one or more of the five horns of the argument, especially options one (infinite regress), three (circularity), and four (infinite regress or circularity). Westerhoff

might reply that the argument is intended only to undermine *pramāṇa* theories, such as his Nyāya opponent's, that rely on realist assumptions and that a contextualist, anti-realist epistemology is acceptable. However, Nāgārjuna says nothing about such a positive epistemological theory. Perhaps Nāgārjuna intends for his audience to read between the lines for such an opposing epistemological theory. However, given the textual evidence, a more plausible reason for Nāgārjuna's reticence on this point would be that he simply does not intend to put forward any positive epistemological theory. This is just what my skeptical interpretation predicts.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Nāgārjuna's commentator Candrakīrti, after citing the VV, argues against later Buddhist developments in epistemology just as forcefully as Nāgārjuna argues against Nyāya epistemology. Candrakīrti even uses Nyāya epistemology to dislodge attachment to Buddhist epistemology (PP, 20). The best explanation for this is that Candrakīrti understood—correctly in my opinion—that the thrust of Nāgārjuna's critique applies generally to any epistemological theory, not just Nyāya.[11] The dialectical nature of Nāgārjuna's philosophical procedure prevented him from making anything like a general skeptical argument, such as those found in modern and contemporary epistemological skepticism; yet the fact that his style of argument has been applied to a variety of other theories makes sense of what I have been calling phase two statements. If Nāgārjuna has a view about epistemology, what would he mean when he says that his purpose is the abandonment of all views (MMK 27.30) or that he has no thesis and is not attempting to rely on the means of knowledge (VV 29–30)?

Even if Nāgārjuna did have something like a view of empty epistemology, such a view would be undermined in phase two. Elsewhere (Mills 2016a, 53–54) I've argued that Westerhoff's empty, contextualist epistemology contains an internal contradiction in that it is alleged to be a thesis of universal emptiness, while universal emptiness itself implies that no argument for emptiness could apply universally to all contexts. This is merely a specific instance of a more general feature of any thesis of emptiness that I identified in the previous chapter. Those who take Nāgārjuna to be presenting a truth-claim at the end of his procedure are faced with a dilemma: either Nāgārjuna is committed to a thesis that contains internal contradictions or he is committed to no thesis whatsoever. Neither of these options is appealing if one wants Nāgārjuna to have a final truth-claim about emptiness.[12]

However, my skeptical interpretation embraces this dilemma: Nāgārjuna is well aware that emptiness undermines itself and he intends for his readers to relinquish this thesis once it has done its

work—that emptiness is self-undermining is the whole point. The thesis of emptiness, which is defended in phase one, is intentionally designed to undermine itself in phase two. But this is not a problem for my interpretation; in fact, the self-undermining character of emptiness is the very means by which Nāgārjuna moves from phase one to phase two.

3.3 Nāgārjuna's Critique of Theories of Causation

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Root Verses on the Middle Way*; hereafter, MMK) is generally considered to be Nāgārjuna's magnum opus.[13] The text consists of 27 chapters on a wide variety of general philosophical topics such as causation, time, and space, as well as specifically Buddhist theories concerning the categories of mental and physical existence (e.g., *āyatanas*, *dhātus*, *skandhas*, etc.), the nature of desire, the lack of an intrinsic self, the Four Noble Truths, *nirvāṇa*, and so forth. The MMK contains numerous attacks on the Abhidharma Buddhist concept of essence (*svabhāva*), which also forms the explicit subject of Chapter 15.

In the next few sections I concentrate on the first chapter of the MMK, which contains Nāgārjuna's most famous treatment of theories of causation. I aim to answer two questions about MMK, chapter one: What is the overall argument of this chapter, and what is the point of this argument? I will answer the former in this section and the latter in the next two sections.

The chapter begins with one of Nāgārjuna's most famous verses, which serves as a thesis statement of chapter one: "Not from itself, nor even from another, nor from both, nor even from no cause, are any arisen beings found anywhere at all" (MMK 1.1).[14] This constitutes a *catuṣkoṭi* (literally, "four-cornered"), or tetralemma, in which four options are presented. Either each option is affirmed in a positive version or each option is denied in a negative version. The *catuṣkoṭi* can be found in early Buddhist texts in both positive and negative formulations.[15] Nāgārjuna tends to employ the negative version.[16] There is an abundance of contemporary scholarship on logical issues concerning the *catuṣkoṭi*.[17] I agree with many scholars (e.g., Ruegg 1977, Chakravarti 1980, and Westerhoff 2006) that correctly understanding the type of negation involved can save the *catuṣkoṭi* from violating the laws of non-contradiction or excluded middle, which keeps it within the bounds of classical logic.[18] However, in this chapter my concern is the structure of the argument, so I will set aside interesting issues about its logical status and relevance in the philosophy of logic.

It is also necessary to understand Nāgārjuna's opponents in MMK 1, and I will identify them as I go through the argument. However, it is worth noting at the outset that the second option of MMK 1.1 (production from another) is the one on which Nāgārjuna spends most of his time and the one that provides much of his framework. This is the view held by Abhidharma Buddhist schools (although the Brahmanical Vaiśeṣika school adheres to a version of this view as well). In Abhidharma metaphysics, there are four *pratyayas*, which I translate as "conditions," although this concept includes aspects of what most contemporary Western people would think of as a cause (e.g., Aristotelian efficient causes). Nāgārjuna lists the conditions: "There are thus only four kinds of conditions (*pratyayas*): material cause (*hetu*), object of a cognition (*ālambana*), immediately preceding cause (*anantaram*), and dominant cause (*adhipateyam*). There is no fifth kind of condition" (MMK 1.2).[19] The material cause (*hetu*) of a sprout is a seed. The sprout would in turn be cause for a mango tree, which is a material cause for a mango. An object of a cognition (*ālambana*) would be the taste that one cognizes when biting into a mango. An immediately preceding cause (*anantaram*) is the state of affairs right before an event, such as a mango reaching one's tongue. A dominant cause (*adhipateyam*) is what sets in motion the whole process and gives it its purpose, such as one's decision to eat a mango to enjoy its tastiness.[20] Nāgārjuna argues against each of these *pratyayas*.

Noting some disagreement among classical and contemporary commentators concerning the details of Nāgārjuna's argument[21], here is my gloss of the arguments against each option of the *catuṣkoṭi*:

Option One: Suppose an arisen being were to arise from itself (this view was held by the *Sāṃkhya*school and called *satkāryavāda*, the view that the effect preexists in the cause).[22] However, one doesn't find the essence (*svabhāva*) of the effect in its conditions (*pratyayas*) (verse 1.3ab). For instance, the light and heat of fire is not found in firewood, nor is the consistency of yogurt in milk.

Option Two: Suppose an arisen being were to arise from something else (this is *asatkāryavāda*, the view that the effect does not preexist in the cause, which was held by Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Abhidharma Buddhists). There are several arguments against this option.

- First, "If its own essence (*svabhāva*) is not found, then the essence of the other (*parabhāva*) is not found" (verse 1.3cd).[23] That is, once one rules out the first option that the essence of the effect is found in the conditions (which means the cause and effect share the same essence), it's not clear how two separate essences—the essence of the cause and of the effect—are related. In the

absence of any way to identify that *this* effect is an effect of *that* cause and *vice versa*, Nāgārjuna concludes that the "essence of the other" (*parabhāva*) or the essence of the cause given the essence of the effect and *vice versa*, is not found.

- Second, Nāgārjuna argues against a way to solve the previous problem, namely, that the two essences are related by a causal power (*kriyā*). "A causal power (*kriyā*) has no cause or condition (*pratyaya*), nor does it occur without causes and conditions" (1.4ab).[24] The idea of a causal power is contradictory, for if one posits a causal power to explain the relation between cause and effect, one needs another relation to explain the relation between the causal power and the cause itself and so forth—hence, an infinite regress ensues. Thus, there *can't be* any such relation, but there *must be* such a relation if option two is to work.[25] The same problem arises if one claims that the conditions possess causal powers (1.4cd).
- Third, Nāgārjuna employs the argument from the three times: *when* does the effect produce the cause?[26] This can't happen *before* the effect exists, because it doesn't make sense to call something a cause when its effect does not yet exist—it should be called a *non*-cause (5cd) and non-existent objects don't have any cause (6c). The effect can't produce the cause *after* the effect exists since it is superfluous to cause a thing that already exists (6d). Maybe there's a third time in which the effect is coming into being, both existing and not existing simultaneously. But this can't work (7ab)—how can something both exist and not exist at the same time especially if the Abhidharma theory of radical momentariness were true? If ultimately existing things (*dharmas*[27]) are fully existent in one moment and nonexistent in the next, this third time cannot work.

Option Three: Perhaps an arisen being could arise through a combination of self-causation and from something else.[28] While Nāgārjuna doesn't deal with this option explicitly, he probably expects his audience to see that, given the rejection of options one and two, a combination of the two could not work.

Option Four: Maybe an arisen being arises from no cause at all.[29] Again, Nāgārjuna doesn't explicitly discuss this option, but readers are perhaps supposed to grasp that this option is either absurd because it contradicts our experience or because it is undesirable for any causal theorist as it gives no explanation at all for conditions.

Nāgārjuna uses these arguments against the material cause (*hetu*), the object of a cognition (*ālambana*), the immediately preceding cause (*anantaram*), and the dominant cause (*adhipateyam*) in verses seven,

eight, nine, and ten, respectively. Verses 11–14 focus on similar issues concerning the effect (*phala*).

3.4 Conventionalist, Anti-Realist, and Epistemological Skeptical Interpretations

Having given my version of the structure of the argument, I move to my second question: what is the point of this argument?

For many interpreters, the point is to rule out essentialist and realist theories of causation to make room for an alternative theory of empty causation. Garfield is one prominent proponent of this variety of interpretation. He takes Nāgārjuna to be advancing a theory of "conventionalist regularism" (Garfield 2002, 72).[30] Garfield claims that Nāgārjuna distinguishes between causes (*hetu*) and conditions (*pratyaya*) and that Nāgārjuna argues against causes but in favor of some conditions (Garfield 1995, 104). According to Garfield, causes have essences and causal powers; conditions, on the other hand, are conventional designations based on observed regularities in experience, which do not require positing the existence of causal powers.

Siderits does not see an important distinction between causes and conditions; instead he claims that the thesis of chapter one is that "the causal relation itself is conceptually constructed" (Siderits 2004, 393; see also Siderits 2007, 199). Nāgārjuna first shows that conditions lack essences (*svabhāva*) because such essences are not finable under analysis, which is the Abhidharma criterion of reality. Then Nāgārjuna demonstrates that what is considered to be a cause or an effect is determined by context and human interests, not real causal powers. The conceptual construction of causal relations implies that any entities that might count as causes or effects are themselves also conceptually constructed, thus supporting an anti-realist thesis of emptiness (Siderits 2004, 411–413). Westerhoff presents a similar view (Westerhoff 2009, 113).

Alternatively, one could take Nāgārjuna to be making the epistemological skeptic's point that we simply lack knowledge of causal matters, whether there are such things as causal powers or not. Interpretations from Garfield and Matilal contain elements of this sort of interpretation,[31] but the clearest example comes from David Burton. He claims that the Madhyamaka point is: "All we have access to is the world as it appears to us, in which whatever mind-independent world exists has been filtered, so to speak, through our

cognitive apparatus" (Burton 2004, 107).[32] In other words, the world may or may not contain such things as causal powers, but we are unable to know whether this is the case. This is an epistemological skeptical point about human knowledge rather than the anti-realist's point about the existence of causal powers or the semantic content of the notion of substantial causes.

3.5 The Cause of Skepticism

The foregoing interpretations all take chapter one of the MMK to either contain or imply a theory about conditions, causal powers, and the like, one that Nāgārjuna accepts in the final analysis as a truth-claim about such phenomena or about our ability to know about them. But I don't think either this chapter or the MMK in general either contain or imply such a theory. I have four reasons for this claim.

First, Nāgārjuna never develops or even explicitly mentions any such theory in chapter one. Instead, the argument is a negative *catuṣkoṭi* that denies four possible options for analyzing causation. There is no positive theory about causation to be found.

Siderits admits that there is no positive theory in the MMK, although he attributes one to Bhāviveka's commentary and claims that it's the type of theory "a Mādhyamika should hold (at the conventional level, of course)" (Siderits 2004, 415 n. 18). I will return later to the issue of whether this is the type of theory a Mādhyamika should hold, noting for now that it seems incompatible with what I have called phase two statements. On the other hand, Garfield says that his main reason for ascribing a theory to the text is that "the entire doctrine of the emptiness of emptiness and the unity of the Two Truths developed in chapter 24 is already implicit in chapter 1 . . . the entire doctrine developed in climatic character in chapter 24 is present in embryo in the first" (Garfield 2002, 41). One might object I have overlooked textual evidence from elsewhere in the MMK.

This leads to my second reason for denying that Nāgārjuna endorses a theory about causation: neither chapter 24 nor any other part of the MMK should be taken as evidence that Nāgārjuna ultimately accepts such a theory once we take phase two statements into account. Garfield points to MMK 24.18, one of the most famous verses of the text: "That which is dependent origination, and that which is designated based on having grasped something, that we call emptiness and the middle path itself" (MMK 24.18).[33] One might think that Nāgārjuna is making a positive assertion about some kind of relationship between the following: dependent origination, "that

which is based on having grasped something" (*sā prajñaptir upādāya*), emptiness, and the middle path.[34] The next verse might even more clearly be seen as presenting a positive theory: "Because nothing which is not dependently originated is found, for that reason indeed nothing which is not empty is found" (MMK 24.19).[35] This verse seems to endorse a particular relationship between dependent origination and emptiness: things are empty *because* they are dependently originated. Since dependent origination is the preeminent Buddhist theory of causation and Nāgārjuna discusses it in depth, one might think that he has a positive view about it.

I agree that Nāgārjuna does seem to present a view about dependent origination and emptiness. But only to a point. To see an all-things-considered view about dependent origination in the MMK is to miss some key textual evidence. In the last two verses of the MMK (27.29–30), Nāgārjuna demonstrates that emptiness leads to the abandoning of all views, what I am calling phase two. If Nāgārjuna means what he says, we should take everything he says that looks like a view about emptiness as a provisional view that ought to be abandoned later.[36] While he develops what looks like a view about emptiness and causation in phase one, in phase two he demonstrates that this view undermines itself along with all others. A skeptically purged Mādhyamika is left without any philosophical views about causation. While the development of provisional views about emptiness is an important step in this process, it is not the final step. I see the shape of Nāgārjuna's argument as follows: MMK 1 undermines other views about causation, MMK 24.18–19 develops a provisional view of emptiness, and MMK 27.29–30 demonstrates that this provisional view undermines itself.

My third reason for thinking that Nāgārjuna should not be taken to be presenting an established causal theory concerns the types of comparative moves made in the defense of such interpretations. While there are obvious resonances between Nāgārjuna and Western philosophers such as Sextus, Hume, and Wittgenstein, these comparisons are themselves often faulty in various ways. Therefore, these comparisons—at least in their typical forms in existing literature—do not support the interpretations of Nāgārjuna they are adduced to support.

Nāgārjuna's arguments in MMK 1 are similar to Sextus's arguments in PH 3.4–5; Sextus even gives a version of the argument from the three times. However, the overall structure of the argument is different: Whereas Nāgārjuna presents four possibilities and denies each one in a negative *catuṣkoṭi*, Sextus argues both for and against the existence of causes, thus creating equipollence (*isostheneia*) in order to suspend judgment. Nonetheless, Garfield reads Sextus in

terms of conventionalist regularism: according to Garfield, the pro-cause argument appeals to observed regularities while the anti-cause argument appeals to conceptual problems with regard to philosophical views about causation. Garfield asserts that Sextus's point is that the idea of real causal powers is not useful in everyday practice, although he points out that neither he nor Sextus either assert or deny the existence of causal powers (Garfield 2002, 263–264 n. 18). I doubt that Sextus would make any particular claim about the necessity of causal ideas in everyday practice; rather, he would follow customs of causal language without making any philosophical claims about such language. Interpretations that see a more constructive side to Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka (e.g., Dreyfus and Garfield 2011) obscure the real point that Sextus and Nāgārjuna do in fact share: they use philosophical arguments to cure their readers of the desire to do philosophy, a point that others have noted (e.g., Kuzminski 2008, Ch. 2, McEvilley 2002, Ch. 17).[37]

Garfield sees another analogue of his conventionalist regularism in the work of David Hume. Both Nāgārjuna and Hume fail to find any good reason for believing that our thinking about causal relations requires that we postulate secret causal powers; however, whereas Hume provides an explanation of why we believe in causation despite its ultimate irrationality (his famous "sceptical solution"), Nāgārjuna offers no such an explanation. Furthermore, Garfield asserts that both Hume and Nāgārjuna claim the very idea of causal powers is "ultimately incoherent" (Garfield 2002, 18); this is true for Nāgārjuna, but Hume does not claim that the idea of a causal power is incoherent.[38] Also, Garfield claims that Nāgārjuna has an account of causal explanation that "grounds ontology in . . . conventions" (Garfield 2002, 73). I am unsure what it means to ground ontology in conventions. Perhaps it would be similar to Siderits's anti-realist contention that causation is not a feature of ultimate reality and that causal language depends on human interests.

While I have argued that I don't think this is Nāgārjuna's view, I don't think it's Hume's view either. Hume is an epistemological skeptic. His claim is that we do not know whether there are causal powers or not. He nowhere either affirms or denies their existence and some recent scholars even think he accepts—or at least does not doubt—the existence of causal powers.[39] Siderits sees that Humean skepticism differs from Nāgārjunian anti-realism, claiming that Nāgārjuna is denying the existence of causal powers rather as opposed to Hume's denial of our knowledge of causal powers (Siderits 2007, 199). However, Nāgārjuna is not denying the existence of causal powers either. He aims to show that most if not all of our theories

about causal powers are incoherent. This is not the same as Hume's epistemological argument against knowledge of causation, but neither is it a straightforward argument about the existence of causal powers. Nāgārjuna's arguments about causation constitute a *conceptual* skepticism[40] intended to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in our theories about causation—even if these arguments did have metaphysical implications, such implications would dissolve in phase two.

Garfield's comparison between Nāgārjuna and Ludwig Wittgenstein focuses on Wittgenstein's thoughts about the concept of a causal explanation in the *Tractatus* 6.371 and 6.372 and the general concept of explanation in *On Certainty* 204 and 344 (Garfield 1995, 114 and Garfield 2002, 10). Garfield sees this as another example of conventionalist regularism (Garfield 2002, 21). I think this focus on constructive philosophy ignores a deeper commonality between Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna in their therapeutic attitude toward their own philosophical practices. While the therapies they recommend are different—Nāgārjuna attacks essence (*svabhāva*) and Wittgenstein reminds philosophers of the everyday use of language—their therapeutic aims are similar. Their philosophical therapy is meant to undermine the philosophical impulse itself.[41] Garfield mentions this commonality (Garfield 2002, 13), but as Dreyfus points out there's a tension between skepticism and constructive philosophy. This is because constructive philosophy often contains the very types of truth-claims for which skeptics offer therapy; therefore, "when we scrutinize more closely the cross-cultural family drawn together by Garfield, we cannot but wonder whether it is as happily united as he wants us to believe" (Dreyfus 2011, 94).

While neither I nor the scholars discussed here think any comparison with Western philosophers should uniquely determine one's interpretation of Nāgārjuna, such comparisons can often be a hermeneutic aid. However, we should be aware that they may sometimes lead us astray as the examples just given have shown.[42]

My fourth and final reason for denying that Nāgārjuna ultimately accepts any theory about causation is that such interpretations do not make sense of Nāgārjuna's phase two statements. If Nāgārjuna meant for us to accept some theory about conventions, regularity, or conceptual construction, one wonders why he would not have said so. There would be no point in going the extra step to tell us that theories of emptiness undermine themselves. It might be the case that Nāgārjuna didn't really mean what he said or that he didn't mean for those statements to be taken straightforwardly (perhaps he meant "all *false* views" or "I have no *essentialist* thesis"). But this is not what he said, and my skeptical interpretation is based on the attempt to take

him at his word. Supposing Nāgārjuna really did mean exactly what he said, there are no final theories about causes and conditions to be found—that is precisely the point.

This is why I have translated the verb *vidyate* as "is found" throughout Nāgārjuna's writings as opposed to "exists."[43] Nāgārjuna is demonstrating what happens conceptually and psychologically when we try to find some basis for a philosophical theory. He focuses so extensively on causation because that is one of the most common routes to dogmatic attachment to views. Such dogmatism would be especially acute in the context where causal theories of dependent origination were among dozens of competing classical Indian theories meant to account for everything from the plant growth and fire to rebirth and the beginning (or beginninglessness) of the universe.

I have not discussed mystical interpretations in this section because mystical interpreters would presumably agree with me that there is no positive causal theory Nāgārjuna wants us to accept. However, I part ways with interpreters who claim that Nāgārjuna supports some sort of nonconceptual knowledge (Murti 1955, 300; Taber 1998, 237). I see nothing in the MMK that suggests any replacement for discursive philosophical theorizing about causality or other matters. Nāgārjuna was offering an escape from such metaphysical attempts rather than any sort of replacement for them—whether it be conventionalist regularism, anti-realism, or mystical intuition.

I also have not said much in this section about epistemological skeptical readings, such as the one presented by David Burton (2004, Ch. 6.). Burton does not thoroughly develop a skeptical reading of MMK 1, although he gives a somewhat Kantian reading according to which Nāgārjuna's point is that our notions of causation are supplied by the mind, which means that we can never have knowledge of things in themselves (Burton 2004, 108). Without delving into finer distinctions between Hume and Kant on this matter, it is safe to say that Burton presents Nāgārjuna as a type of epistemological skeptic for whom our knowledge of reality (including causal features) is impossible or at least radically incomplete. In my previous comments on comparisons with Hume, however, I have noted that Nāgārjuna's skepticism is thoroughly conceptual rather than epistemological. His arguments aim to show the incoherence of various causal theories, up to and including any causal theory of emptiness. Whereas Humean and Kantian forms of epistemological skepticism deny knowledge about causal features of reality (even if Hume offers a "sceptical solution" and Kant later proposes a solution in the form of his transcendental idealism), Nāgārjuna's targets are theories about causation and in particular whether any such theories can be made coherent. His aim in doing so is not to deepen or to solve a theoretical

problem in epistemology, but to offer a therapy for Buddhist intellectuals prone to grasping at philosophical theories.[44]

3.6 Conclusion: Combining Analysis-Insight and Quietism

In this chapter I have applied my general skeptical interpretation of Nāgārjuna to two specific topics within his writings: epistemology and metaphysical theories of causation. I demonstrated that my two-phase skeptical interpretation makes sense of what other interpreters see as positive truth-claims about existence or knowledge, and my interpretation fares far better when it comes to making sense of Nāgārjuna's statements that he has no view or thesis. If my interpretation is right, we can take Nāgārjuna at his word both when he seems to be presenting a thesis of emptiness with regard to topics such as knowledge or causation but also when he says that he has no thesis at all. And doing so is fully in line with earlier strands of Buddhist thought in India.

As I've discussed previously (e.g., sections 1.4 and 2.5), early Buddhism contained two often-competing strands: analysis-insight and quietism. In the centuries after early Buddhist texts were compiled, the analysis-insight tendency found some of its greatest proponents in the Abhidharma traditions. In Abhidharma the purpose of Buddhist philosophy is primarily to present an exhaustive analysis and categorization of facets of human experience as a means to lessening attachment and achieving insight into the true nature of reality.

This chapter has given some specific examples of ways in which Nāgārjuna combined these two strands. While Nāgārjuna is rightly understood as one of the most vociferous critics of Abhidharma traditions, his critique incorporates Abhidharma-style analysis, using it as a means toward the goal of Buddhist quietism. Nāgārjuna aims to demonstrate that Abhidharma analysis—including the Abhidharma criterion that we should not accept the existence of that which disappears under analysis—can be pursued so thoroughly that it turns on itself, just like Candrakīrti's purgative drug. As one pursues analysis, the promise of insight into any truth-claim dissolves. Even if Nāgārjuna provisionally accepts theories of empty means of knowledge or empty causation, he cannot be said to have accepted such theories as the final word on such topics. Instead, Nāgārjuna's philosophical procedure is a therapy intended for people dogmatically attached to the pursuit of epistemological or metaphysical theories. As a quietist, Nāgārjuna's final word is—whether paradoxically or not—silence. But this is not a mystical silence of ineffable, transcendent

knowledge. It is the silence of skepticism about philosophy, a silence born of having moved beyond the desire for such knowledge.

Nāgārjuna's skeptical silence perhaps bolsters observations such as that of Hayes (1994) that Nāgārjuna had relatively little influence on the direction of the classical Indian tradition that came after him, even though his influence elsewhere (Tibet, East Asia, and the West) has been tremendous. In a tradition that put a premium on the development and analysis of theses and theories in a sort of "arms race" of philosophical debate, philosophers like Nāgārjuna, for whom such debates are a problem to be overcome, would be seen as oddities rather than worthy adversaries.[45] However, once more positive interpretations of Nāgārjuna arose, according to which he is presenting truth-claims that he wishes to defend, these became far more influential outside of the classical Indian context where they found fresh defenders and creative innovators.

Nonetheless, as I showed in section 2.6, skeptical interpretations of Nāgārjuna similar to my own were never entirely absent within the Buddhist tradition. Philosophers such as Candrakīrti, Kumārajīva, and Patsab Nyimadrak understood Nāgārjuna's quietist motivation as a skeptic about philosophy, thus continuing the tradition that began with early Buddhist quietism.

As I show in chapters 4–7, it was not only Buddhists who carried the torch of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy (again I implore readers to keep in mind the specific sense of this type of skepticism as described in the introduction and fleshed out in the previous chapters). This tradition was always a minority in classical India, but it was a persistent one. While Nāgārjuna was the first major pillar of skepticism about philosophy, he was not the last. The other two pillars combined Nāgārjuna-style *prasaṅga* arguments with *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism in the case of Śrī Harṣa (see chapters 6 and 7) and materialism and Sañjayan skepticism in the case of Jayarāśi (see chapters 4 and 5). As I will show in the next two chapters, Jayarāśi developed elements of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy as a response to the rise of powerful new theories in logic and epistemology in the wake of the Buddhist philosopher Dignāga.

NOTES

1. Mysticism won't be a focus in this chapter. While I agree with mystical interpreters that Nāgārjuna has no ultimate theories about philosophical matters, I disagree that there is some mystical insight intended to supplant such theories (see the previous chapter, in the section 2.2).

2. Another helpful overview of Nāgārjuna's argument forms can be found in

Siderits and Katsura (2013, 7–9).

3. Note that Matilal's use of the terms "illocutionary" and "propositional" are based on Searle (1969). Westerhoff has compared *prasajya* and *paryudāsa* with the contemporary concepts of exclusion negation and choice negation, although he prefers the terms "non-implicational negation" and "implicational negation" (Westerhoff 2006, 369–370).

4. For more on *prasajya* negation, see chapter 1 (in the section 1.5) as well as Matilal (1971), Matilal (1998, Ch. 2), Ruegg (1977), Chakravarti (1980), and Westerhoff (2006).

5. See NS 2.1.8–11. See Bronkhorst (1985) for a treatment of this section as well as the relation between Nāgārjuna and early Nyāya.

6. I have given a detailed treatment of my skeptical interpretation of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV) in a recent publication (Mills 2016a), so I direct readers there for a more comprehensive version of the interpretation set forth in this section. For more on the history of the text and issues of authorship, see the previous chapter, especially endnote 2.

7. *naiva svataḥ prasiddhir na parasparataḥ parapramāṇair vā/na bhavati na ca prameyair na cāpy akasmāt pramāṇānām// (VV 51)*. Perhaps this could be called a five-cornered negation, or "*pañcakoṭi*" as opposed to the more famous four-cornered negation (*catuṣkoṭi*).

8. For further elucidations of verses 34–39, see Siderits (1980, 313–314), Matilal (1986, Ch. 2), and Westerhoff (2010, 74–80).

9. *yato bhavati no 'tra saṃdehaḥ//* (VV 51d).

10. For a slightly different characterization of the argument, see Siderits (1980, 310–320). While Siderits sees the same five options I do, he categorizes them slightly differently into attempts at intrinsic and extrinsic proofs of the *pramāṇas*.

11. For more detailed versions of my skeptical treatment of Candrakīrti, see Mills (2015b) and (2016a).

12. Garfield and Priest (2002) give another option in terms of dialetheist logic.

13. For more on the history of the MMK as a text and its attribution to Nāgārjuna, see note 2 of chapter 2.

14. *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ/utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kva cana ke cana//* MMK 1.1.

15. For instance, Māluṅkyaputta gives a positive *catuṣkoṭi* concerning whether the *Tathāgata* (i.e., a Buddha) exists after death as part of his famous ten unanswered questions; the Buddha's refusal to answer constitutes a negative *catuṣkoṭi* (MN 1.426–432). Also, Sañjaya employs negative *catuṣkoṭis* on every issue he is asked about in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2.32; see also chapter 1, in the section Materialism, Sañjayan Eel-Wriggling, and Early Buddhist Quietism). The unanswered questions, including the *catuṣkoṭi*, appear again in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 1.187–190). See Jayatilleke (1963, Ch. 7), for a thorough treatment of the *catuṣkoṭi* in early Buddhism.

16. For example, see MMK 22.11 and 25.17. MMK 18.8 is a rare positive *catuṣkoṭi*.

17. See Robinson (1957), Ruegg (1977), Chakravarti (1980), Galloway (1989), Garfield and Priest (2002), and Westerhoff (2006), (2009, Ch. 4). Ruegg (1977, 39–52) summarizes *catuṣkoṭi* scholarship from the 1930s to the early 1970s.

18. Logical issues arise in understanding a negative *catuṣkoṭi* as such:

1. ~P

2. ~~P
3. ~ (P & ~P)
4. ~~(P v ~P)

(In MMK 1.1, "P" would be "the cause arises from itself.") If this is interpreted within classical propositional logic, denying option 1 and option 2 simultaneously violates the Law of Non-Contradiction, since "~~P" is (by the rule of Double Negation Elimination) equivalent to "P" so it yields "~P & P." In positive versions of the *catuṣkoṭi* (e.g., MMK 18.8), option 4 is "~(P v ~P)," which violates the Law of Excluded Middle. Additionally, the third and fourth options are not logically distinct: applying De Morgan's Theorem to option four of the positive *catuṣkoṭi* ("~(P v ~P)") turns it into "~P & ~~P" which (via Double Negation Elimination) is logically equivalent to the third option ("(P & ~P)"). Ruegg (1977), Chakravarti (1980), and Westerhoff (2006) bring in the *prasajya-paryudāsa* distinction to understand the negations of each option of the negative *catuṣkoṭi* as *prasajya* negations that do not share the opponent's assumptions. For Westerhoff Nāgārjuna employs *prasajya* negation of both a proposition and its *paryudāsa* negation, so there is no violation of the Principles of Non-Contradiction or Excluded Middle any more than there is in saying "the number seven is neither green nor not green." Westerhoff and Chakravarti discuss "illocutionary negation," noting the performative aspect of refusing to engage in a practice such as promising or asserting (Chakravarti 1980, 305; Westerhoff 2006, 379). Westerhoff sees this as a "more general notion" than *prasajya* negation, since it also includes cases such as suspending judgment due to lack of evidence; he takes the fourth option of the negative *catuṣkoṭi* to mean that Nāgārjuna does not assert either P or ~P, which makes it logically distinct from the third option (Westerhoff 2006, 379–380). I agree with Chakravarti who sees all four negations as illocutionary negations. This may make options three and four logically equivalent, but only if illocutionary negations are within the purview of Double Negation Elimination, which they may not be. Keeping in mind Nāgārjuna's dialectical situation, his point is that his opponents might believe these are separate options. Garfield and Priest (2002) claim that some of Nāgārjuna's statements imply true contradictions and that Nāgārjuna is hinting at a type of non-classical, paraconsistent logic called dialetheism; however, nothing as logically exotic as dialetheism is required here. Understanding the type of negation involved will do. Dialetheism may be true (or true and false at the same time), but it is not required to make sense of Nāgārjuna.

19. *catvāraḥ pratyayā hetuś cālabanam anantaraṃ/tathaivādhipateyaṃ ca pratyayo nāsti pañcamaḥ//* MMK 1.2.

20. For more on the *pratyayas* and their Abhidharma context, see Garfield (1995, 108–109), Siderits and Katsura (2006, 135), and Siderits (2007, 194).

21. Siderits notes at least one difference in Buddhapālita's and Candrakīrti's interpretations of MMK 1.3cd in that Candrakīrti sees it as linked to verse four (Siderits 2004, 404). Some differing summaries are in Hayes (1994, 308–310), Garfield (1995, 103–123), Taber (1998, 213–222), Siderits (2004, 401–408), and Westerhoff (2009, 99–113). Garfield, unlike most others commentators, claims Nāgārjuna draws a distinction between cause (*hetu*) and condition (*pratyaya*) and seeks to demonstrate the incoherence of essential causes while showing that empty conditions are acceptable within "Nāgārjuna's conventionalist regularism" (Garfield 2002, 72; Garfield 1995, 103–105). Siderits claims such a distinction "leads to a strained reading of MMK 1.4–5, as well as to the acute problem that he must then make MMK 1.11–13 objections" (Siderits 2004, 415 n. 18). I agree with

Siderits here and would also point out that *hetus* are listed as one *kind* of *pratyaya* and that Nāgārjuna argues against each of the four *pratyayas* in MMK 1.7–10. I see no evidence for Garfield's distinction between *hetus* and *pratyayas*, although Garfield admits one of his reasons for drawing this distinction is to reconcile chapter 1 with the seemingly constructive view implied by MMK 24 (Garfield 2002, 41).

22. Westerhoff notes that there are actually two versions of option one: the first is that "cause and effect are *the very same object*" and the second, which was the Sāṃkhya theory, is that "the effect is *contained in*, and forms a part of, the cause" (Westerhoff 2009, 100, 103).

23. *avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate.* MMK 1.3cd. Garfield glosses this argument as follows: "The view is in fact internally contradictory. Given that things have no intrinsic nature, they are not essentially different. Given that they lack difference, they are interdependent. But given that interdependence, there cannot be the otherness needed to build otherness-essence out of dependence" (Garfield 1995, 112). Siderits (2004, 416 n. 20) argues that this leaves it open to Hayes's charge of equivocation on the words *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* such that they can mean either identity and difference or causal independence and causal dependence (Hayes 1994, 312–315). To avoid attributing this fallacy to Nāgārjuna, Siderits follows Candrakīrti in seeing verse 3cd as a setup for the introduction of the idea of *kriyā* (activity, causal power) in verse four (Siderits 2004, 404; Siderits 2007, 194). Siderits then glosses the argument of 3cd as follows: "Since the intrinsic nature of the effect is not in the conditions, it will not do to say that the effect arises from something with a distinct nature (that the cause is *parabhāva* to the effect)" (Siderits 2004, 404). Siderits's linking of 3cd to verse four allows Nāgārjuna to avoid equivocating on identity and independence, since it shows how these terms consistently refer to the identity of the causes and effects. Siderits construes the argument as raising the issue of how the cause and effect are to be related if they are separate. If the first option (the effect arises from itself) were correct, it would be easy to see how causes cause their particular effects (cause and effect have the same essence); but the second option can't answer this question unless you bring in some causal power (*kriyā*), which sets up verse four's rejection of *kriyā*. For an alternative attempt to avoid Hayesian fallacies, see Taber (1998).

24. *kriyā na pratyayavatī nāpratyayavatī kriyā.* MMK 1.4ab.

25. See also Siderits (2004, 405–406), Siderits (2007, 194–195), Garfield (1995, 113–114), Westerhoff (2009, 105–107), and Siderits and Katsura (2013, 21–22).

26. Here I am more or less following Siderits, who is in turn more or less following Candrakīrti in finding the conclusion of the argument from the three times in 1.7ab (Siderits 2004, 406–408; Siderits 2007, 195; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 23).

27. In Abhidharma, the only things that ultimately exist are *dharmas*: impartite, momentary events or tropes with essences (*svabhāva*) that do not disappear when philosophically analyzed by a careful thinker (Siderits 2007, 111–113; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 24). Goodman (2004) argues that *dharmas* in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* are similar to the contemporary metaphysical idea of tropes, which are neither substances nor universals.

28. This option perhaps belongs to Jain philosophers given their theory of non-one-sidedness (*anekāntavāda*) (Sullivan 1988, 91; Westerhoff 2009, 109 n. 56).

29. Sullivan (1988, 91) claims this is the Cārvāka position. Westerhoff explains that the Nikāyas place the Cārvākas in option two, while modern commentators such as Murti and Kalupahana place the Cārvākas in option four (Westerhoff

2009, 104, 111 n. 60). I don't think either of these options fits the Cārvāka view presented in the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*. There Mādhva has Cārvākas consider an objection that their view leads to the variety of things in the world being causeless or without explanation (*ākasmikaṃ*). The Cārvāka answer is: "If someone were to say that (*iti cet*), this is not valid, because the arising of that [variety] is just from its nature (*svabhāvāt*)" (SDS, p. 4). The idea that things arise from their own nature is corroborated by other Cārvāka fragments (Bhattacharya 2002, 604), which makes it more like option one. However, in chapter 4, I will discuss at least two other varieties of Cārvākas: the "more educated" Cārvākas that accepted a limited form of inference and skeptical Cārvākas exemplified by Jayarāśi. While Jayarāśi would join Nāgārjuna in rejecting all four options, the causal theories of the more educated Cārvākas are more difficult to determine and there may be differing views among this group (Gokhale 2015, 134). As for option four, it's possible that Nāgārjuna has no specific opponent in mind, but presents this option as a logical possibility—a tactic Jayarāśi sometimes uses.

30. Garfield consistently endorses this interpretation: Garfield (1995, 103–123), Garfield (2002, Chs. 1, 2, and 4), and Garfield and Priest (2002).

31. Garfield favorably compares his interpretation to Hume's skepticism concerning causation (e.g., Garfield 2002, 7), and Matilal sometimes take Nāgārjuna to be giving a truth-claim about knowledge, namely, that we lack it in some or all domains (e.g., Matilal 1986, 51).

32. I should note that Burton is not wholly endorsing this epistemological skeptical interpretation, but rather presenting it as a somewhat plausible reading alongside a form of moderate realism (Burton 2004, 126–129). He also considers a more radical skeptical interpretation that "turns upon itself" (Burton 2004, 117), although he warns against what he sees as the irrationalism of this interpretation. Lastly, it is also worth noting that Burton has elsewhere argued explicitly against skeptical interpretations (Burton 1999, 34–41).

33. *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe/sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā//* MMK 24.18.

34. I leave the question of the precise nature of this relationship undetermined. Berger (2010) provides an overview of and argument against nominalist and conventionalist readings of this verse.

35. *apratītya samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate/yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate//* MMK 25.19.

36. See also MMK 13.8. Additionally, there are passages in the *Ratnāvalī* in which Nāgārjuna argues against the existence of dependent origination (e.g., 1.37, 1.65). Frauwallner translates *Ratnāvalī* 1.37 as follows: "Since it (= the dependent becoming of the cycle of existences) cannot come about from itself, from something other, and from both, and this in all three time periods, the belief in an 'I' becomes invalid and thereby deed and birth also" (Frauwallner 2010, 223). Frauwallner takes this to mean, "Liberation takes place . . . through recognition of the unreality of dependent origination" (Frauwallner 2010, 217).

37. Kuzminski and McEvilley, however, see more similarity in the structure of the arguments than I do. I agree with Burton that the structures of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments are quite different: Pyrrhonists demonstrate the equal convincingness (*isostheneia*) of two opposing views and Mādhyamikas reject all the positions considered (Burton 1999, 39–40; although Burton elsewhere gives a more favorable comparison—see 2004, 112–113). Other interesting comparisons of Sextus and Nāgārjuna are Grenier (1970), Hayes (1988, 51–62), and Matilal (1986, 67).

38. On this point (and many others) I agree with Robert Fogelin: "Of course,

Hume is not a conceptual skeptic in this area. He nowhere suggests that our inductive inferences are unintelligible. Nor does he suggest this with respect to notions of causality and necessary connection" (Fogelin 1985, 46). The closest Hume comes to saying that the concept of a cause is incoherent when he argues that the principle that all things must have a cause cannot be demonstrated *a priori* based on the alleged impossibility of effects producing themselves or coming before their causes, because to do so begs the question in favor of a causal order (*Treatise* 1.3.3).

39. In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section Four, Hume explains his goal as follows: "If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of that evidence which assures us of matters of fact, we must inquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect." Note that he is not seeking an answer to a metaphysical question of whether cause and effect actually exist. See also Section Four, Part Two, where he discusses causes as "secret powers" and claims "There is no known connection between the sensible qualities and the secret powers." Some scholars see important differences between Hume's treatment of causation in the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* (e.g., Baier 1991, Ch. 3; Fogelin 1985, Ch. 4, etc.). Consider also the so-called "New Hume interpretation" of skeptical realism, according to which Hume actually accepts, or does not deny, the existence of causal powers and merely doubts that we know anything about such causal powers. (See Read and Richman 2007 for an anthology on this topic.)

40. On the distinction between epistemological and conceptual skepticism, see Fogelin (1985, Ch. 1) and Garrett (2004).

41. Another comparison of Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna on causation can be found in Gudmunsen (1977, Ch. 6).

42. For a far more critical take on comparisons between Nāgārjuna and Western philosophers, see Tuck (1990).

43. The verbal root √*vid* in the passive or middle voice can mean, "to be found, exist, be . . . there is, there exists" (Monier-Williams 1994, 965). For instance, I have translated MMK 1.3cd as "If its own essence (*svabhāva*) is not found (*avidyamāne*), then the essence of the other (*parabhāva*) is not found (*vidyate*)" rather than "If its own essence (*svabhāva*) does not exist (*avidyamāne*), then the essence of the other (*parabhāva*) does not exist (*vidyate*)." There is little agreement among English translations. Kalupahana (1986) tends to translate it as "is evident." Inada (1970), Sprung (1979), and Stcherbatsky (1968) most often opt for "exists" or "there is." Siderits and Katsura (2013) and Garfield (1995) tend toward a greater variety of translations in different verses. McGagney (1997) most often translates it as "occurs."

44. I don't mean to impose any strict demarcation between theoretical and practical/therapeutic pursuits. Hume, for instance, says that his skeptical philosophy could make people less dogmatic in their everyday lives (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 12.3). It is also important to understand the position of early modern European philosophers like Hume and Kant as part of larger conversations of the European Enlightenment in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. For philosophers like Hume and Kant, philosophy was never *merely* theoretical.

45. The same phenomenon perhaps also accounts for the relative lack of interest in skepticism about philosophy among academic philosophers today.

Chapter 4

Jayarāśi's Cārvāka Skepticism

Irreligious Skepticism about Philosophy

> *When, in this way, the principles are entirely destroyed, all everyday practices are made delightful, because they are not deliberated.*
>
> —*Jayarāśi,* Tattvopaplavasiṃha *14.5*

In the previous chapters I argued that Nāgārjuna is best interpreted as a skeptic about philosophy in the tradition stretching back to the *Ṛg Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and especially early Buddhism. Instead of using philosophical arguments to deny knowledge of the external world or mind-independent reality, Nāgārjuna uses his philosophical arguments to uproot the impulse to philosophize, purging a thorough Mādhyamika of any philosophical views to which a Buddhist might become attached. In this chapter, my aim is to show that Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa (c. 770–830 CE[1]) is also best interpreted as a skeptic about philosophy and as one of the three pillars of such skepticism in the classical Indian tradition along with Śrī Harṣa, who will be the subject of chapters 6 and 7.[2]

According to the broad periodization I am using for this book[3], Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa all fall within the classical period, a period that can be distinguished from the ancient or early period by its increased systematization and argumentative rigor. However, Franco (2013) suggests a further division of this period into three parts: "(1) the period up to Dignāga, (2) the period between Dignāga and Udayana, and (3) the Navya Nyāya period" (Franco 2013, 24). In this scheme, the dividing line between (1) and (2) would be in the 500s CE while the dividing line between (2) and (3) would be sometime in the centuries after Udayana (c. 1000 CE) and before Gaṅgeśa (c. 1325), who is typically regarded as the founder of Navya Nyāya as an explicit response to the critiques of Śrī Harṣa and others.

The basis for Franco's periodization is the distinctly epistemological turn taken by many classical Indian philosophers in the wake of Dignāga's work and in turn the influence of the newer, even more technical epistemological and metaphysical vocabulary of Navya Nyāya, which grew out of later developments in Nyāya but culminated in the work of Gaṅgeśa. Turning to the tradition of skepticism about philosophy, we could say that Franco's periodization provides a blueprint for the types of philosophy to which the three pillars are reacting. This accounts for the fact that Jayarāśi focuses almost exclusively on the epistemological theories of his opponents; his target is what we might refer to as the tradition of *pramāṇavāda*, or systematic discourse on the means of knowledge.[4] Likewise, the significance of later developments in Nyāya for Śrī Harṣa will become apparent later.

Aside from this difference of philosophical context and focus, Jayarāśi's skepticism about philosophy differs from Nāgārjuna's in three more ways. First, it is more direct in that it does not come in two phases. Second, it is not intended to be compatible with Buddhism or any other religious practice. Third, it allows us to see how Jayarāśi's skepticism about philosophy serves his Cārvāka sympathies as a development of the materialist and Sañjayan strains of early Indian philosophy (see chapter 1) and as an instantiation of the type of skepticism I have been calling skepticism about philosophy as opposed to epistemological skepticism.[5]

My plan for this chapter is to begin with an articulation of the need for Cārvāka studies to show that, despite being of relatively little interest to many contemporary scholars, the study of Cārvāka in general and Jayarāśi in particular can contribute toward a richer understanding of the diversity of Indian thought. Next I will present the basic thrust of Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (*Lion of the Destruction of Principles*): the destruction of all philosophical principles, especially in epistemology, which had become the preeminent area of philosophy in his day. A more detailed examination of some of the arguments of this text will be the subject of the next chapter in which I will make a case study of Jayarāśi's arguments against the epistemological theories of Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE) and Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660 CE).

To understand the point of Jayarāśi's destruction of epistemology, I find it helpful to compare Jayarāśi's outlook to contextualism in contemporary epistemology: in the context of epistemology, epistemology self-destructs, while in the context of everyday life, there is no need for epistemology. Lastly, I consider how, by connecting the rejection of epistemology with a form of contextualism, Jayarāśi's text

can be viewed in light of his Cārvāka sympathies. Ultimately, the delightful destruction of epistemology clears the ground for a form of life free from the burdens of philosophy and religion. Thus, we have a uniquely irreligious strand within the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy, but one that is a development of non-Buddhist and non-mystical elements of early Indian skepticism.

4.1 The Need for Cārvāka Studies

The Cārvākas are often considered a philosophical aberration within classical India, and some scholars have discounted the importance of philosophical skepticism in classical Indian philosophy. It should not be a surprise then, that Jayarāśi, who is both a Cārvāka and a skeptic, is often overlooked. Whereas in the previous chapters I argued that Nāgārjuna was primarily developing the strands of early Buddhism quietism within the context of the beginning of the classical tradition in India, I argue that Jayarāśi was primarily developing the early strands of materialism and Sañjayan skepticism within the context of the post-Dignāgan epistemological turn.

A difficulty in the study of Cārvāka is a relative lack of primary texts. Cārvāka views are described in texts of other schools, but there are no genuine texts available, with the sole exception of Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (hereafter, TUS).[6] There are references to Cārvākas or others with materialist views scattered throughout a variety of early texts (as discussed in chapter 1), and there is evidence that Cārvākas were present as late as the sixteenth century CE in the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar.[7] Ramkrishna Bhattacharya (2002) has presented perhaps the most thorough collection of Cārvāka fragments to date. However, the most often cited representation of Cārvāka views continues to be Mādhava's *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* (*Collection of All Philosophical Systems*). In this text, Cārvāka opinions are set forth as follows. In metaphysics, Cārvākas are worldly (hence, their alternate name, Lokāyata, which means "prevalent in the world" or "disseminated among the people") and materialist, denying the existence of a non-material soul, karma, and rebirth. In epistemology, Cārvākas hold that perception is the only *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) and offer a technically sophisticated critique of inference.[8] In ethics, Cārvākas are anti-religious, holding a hedonistic view that pleasure is the ultimate end of life. They claim that their view should be accepted out of kindness to living beings.

Radhakrishnan and Moore's influential *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* contains clear examples of the "Cārvāka as Exception" view. In the General Introduction, Indian philosophy is claimed to be

mainly "spiritual." The phrase "except the Cārvāka" appears no less than four times in the following nine pages (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1989, xxiii–xxxi). The "Cārvāka as Exception" view continues to be somewhat standard today. Cārvākas are usually presented in sharp contrast against the background of soteriological presuppositions of Indian philosophers. I would not deny that the Cārvākas were in most ways exceptions to the rule of their fellow philosophers; however, rather than an excuse to ignore or quickly dismiss them, I argue that this makes them all the more interesting.

Nonetheless, there has been scholarly interest in Cārvāka in recent decades.[9] Among these studies, K. N. Jayatilleke (1963) has provided a useful framework for understanding Cārvāka. He distinguishes three kinds of Cārvāka views: those who accept only perception, those who accept perception and a form of inference limited to perceivable objects, and lastly those who reject all *pramāṇas* (Jayatilleke 1963, 71–72). The first group consists of the Cārvākas of the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, the second is represented by Purandara, and the third by Jayarāśi. Purandara's "more educated" (*suśikṣitatara*) strain of Cārvāka is discussed by Jayanta in the *Nyāyamañjarī*.[10]

Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (TUS) was familiar to some classical Indian philosophers. In chapters 6 and 7, I will argue that Śrī Harṣa is part of the tradition of skepticism of which Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi are part. One reason for thinking so is that Śrī Harṣa refers both to Mādhyamikas and Cārvākas that do not accept any means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), which are likely references to Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi or perhaps to other skeptical Mādhyamikas or Cārvākas. In the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* he denies that entering into a philosophical debate entails that both parties accept the existence of *pramāṇas* "because one understands the extensive discourses of Cārvākas, Mādhyamikas and so forth even though they do not accept that (i.e., that the *pramāṇas* exist)" (KhKh, p. 7).[11] The Jain philosophers Anantavīrya, Vidyānanda, and Mallişena Sūri all refer to Jayarāśi more directly: Anantavīrya refers to Jayarāśi by name, Vidyānanda refers to a *tattvopaplavavādin*, and Mallişena Sūri refers to the TUS by name.[12] The Naiyāyika Bhāsarvajña discusses many of Jayarāśi's arguments in order to refute them.[13]

A manuscript of the TUS was rediscovered in 1926 and an edition published in 1940 (Sanghavi and Parikh 1987, "Preface"; Franco 1994, xi). A translation of one chapter of the TUS appears in Radhakrishnan and Moore's *Sourcebook*, and Jayarāśi has been mentioned in other influential studies of Indian philosophy (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957, 236–246; Potter 1977, 50). Jayarāśi has been frequently mentioned, but there have been relatively few in-depth studies of his work.[14]

For many interpreters one of Jayarāśi's immediate challenges comes in the question of his affiliation. Was Jayarāśi a Cārvāka? If the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* were to give the criteria of Cārvāka membership, Jayarāśi would fail the test. Jayarāśi not only denies all means of knowledge, but he even denies that the materialist principles of Bṛhaspati, the putative founder of Cārvāka, can be ultimately established. Thus, Jayarāśi accepts neither the epistemology nor the metaphysics of the Cārvāka school and must be denied membership. This is the most common argument against Jayarāśi's Cārvāka affiliation.15

Sanghavi and Parikh offer a response to this argument. According to them Jayarāśi is a member of a "particular division" of the Cārvāka school for the reason that Bṛhaspati is the only philosopher that he quotes favorably. They offer an explanation for his apparent repudiation of Bṛhaspati's materialism: "Jayarāśi thus disposes of the orthodoxy and starts, so to say, with the permission of his Guru, by removing him out of the way, on his campaign of demolishing the doctrines of other schools" (Sanghavi and Parikh 1987, xii). In other words, Jayarāśi takes up the negative wing of Cārvāka argumentation with such force that he must demolish even the positive program of other Cārvākas in order to complete his task. To put it another way: he "out-Bṛhaspatis" Bṛhaspati. Likewise, Gokhale argues that Jayarāśi accepts the negative thrust of Cārvāka, but he also, like all Cārvākas, praises a this-worldly orientation (Gokhale 2015, 30–31).16

There are two reasons to see Jayarāśi as a representative of a skeptical sub-school of Cārvāka. First, some classical Indian philosophers such as Śrī Harṣa refer to a skeptical branch of Cārvākas (KhKh, p. 7), which gives some evidence for Jayatilleke's suggestion that Jayarāśi represents a skeptical sub-school.

Second, other schools, such as Buddhism, Mīmāṃsā, or Vedānta, exhibit internal diversity. There is no reason to conclude that Cārvāka could not exhibit similar diversity. It would be a mistake to deny that Madhyamaka is a Buddhist school because Mādhyamikas argue against the means of knowledge just as it would be a mistake to deny that Prabhākāra and Bhaṭṭa Mīmāṃsā are both Mīmāṃsā schools despite their differences in epistemology, or to deny that Advaita, Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and so forth can all be Vedānta due to their extensive metaphysical differences. Likewise, it would be a mistake to view Cārvāka as a monolithic philosophical bloc incapable of internal diversity. As Bhattacharya notes (2010), there is evidence of at least four commentators on Bṛhaspati's lost *Cārvākasūtra*: Kambalāśvatara, Purandara, Aviddhakarṇa, and Udbhaṭa. These commentators did not agree on everything and Udbhaṭa, in fact, may have even been a metaphysical dualist! Despite the evidence he gives of this internal

diversity, Bhattacharya nonetheless assumes that there must have been one "*original* Cārvāka position," which he takes to be closer to the view of Purandara that admits of inference insofar as it can be confirmed by experience (Bhattacharya 2010, 423). Bhattacharya suggests that later commentators either supported this original position, as did Purandara, or strayed from it, as did Udbhaṭa.

I'm not convinced that, even if there were one original Cārvāka position, there would be enough evidence to describe the details of that position. We have only fragments of Bṛhaspati's original text and the earliest evidence suggests that there were a variety of materialist, skeptical, and anti-religious philosophers who constituted the historical background of later Cārvāka developments. As I discussed in the first chapter, the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2) relates the stories of several possible proto-Cārvākas: Purana Kassapa denies karmic retribution or reward for one's actions, Ajita Kesakambalin offers a materialist view in which the person is annihilated at death, and Sañjaya Belatthaputta refuses to put forward a view in a strikingly skeptical fashion. While it is possible that Cārvākas developed from one source at the expense of others, I think that the evidence—scanty though it may be—suggests that the traditions that later came to be labeled as Cārvāka were quite diverse from the beginning and that Cārvāka retained this internal diversity as it developed.

While none of this provides strict proof that Jayarāśi was a genuine Cārvāka, my hope is to show that there are reasons to think Jayarāśi represented one of several diverse strands of Cārvāka. Near the end of the chapter I will give more reasons to include Jayarāśi in the Cārvāka camp. For now I suggest that, given the evidence of internal diversity of metaphysical and epistemological views, one plausible criterion for Cārvāka membership is that the philosophers in question see their work as part of the pursuit of an irreligious way of life, which in the classical Indian context would consist in a rejection of the authority of the Vedas or of religious teachers such as the Buddha and Mahāvīra. This criterion gives less weight to following the letter of Bṛhaspati and more to following the spirit of his irreligiousness. My more inclusive criterion can accommodate a dualist like Udbhaṭa, the Cārvākas of the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, and Purandara's limited endorsement of inference. On my view Jayarāśi really is a Cārvāka, but the Cārvāka family is big enough to include a skeptic about philosophy like him.

4.2 Jayarāśi's Method of Destruction: Developing the Materialist and Sañjayan Strains of Early Indian Skepticism

I am arguing that Jayarāśi should be thought of as a skeptic about philosophy, much like I have argued for Sextus Empiricus in the introduction and for Nāgārjuna in chapters 1 and 2. One difference is Jayarāśi is more narrowly focused on epistemology (*pramāṇavāda*). This shouldn't be surprising as Indian philosophy generally took an epistemological turn around the time of Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE). I'll say more in the next chapter about why I think Jayarāśi concerns himself with epistemology, but for now I simply mean to point out that Sextus and Jayarāśi are both skeptics about epistemology, by which I mean that they are skeptics about what their contemporaries thought of as systematic discourse about knowledge. In the previous chapters, I also argued that Nāgārjuna could be read as a skeptic about epistemology but also other areas of philosophy, especially metaphysical topics such as causal theories.

But in saying that these philosophers are skeptical about epistemology, what do they mean by "epistemology"? Sextus's critique of epistemology centers on the division of philosophy the Stoics called logic. Nāgārjuna's main target in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* is the discourse on *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) as conceived by his Nyāya interlocutor; Nāgārjuna's commentator Candrakīrti is just as skeptical about Dignāga's Buddhist epistemology (PP, p. 20–25). As we shall see in chapters 6 and 7, Śrī Harṣa's main target is the Nyāya school's elaborate theories in epistemology and metaphysics.

In the TUS Jayarāśi also critiques Nyāya epistemology (chapters one and seven) and Buddhist epistemology (chapters four, five, and nine). Additionally Jayarāśi critiques almost every epistemological theory of his day, with chapters on Mīmāṃsā (chapters two, five, and ten) and Sāṃkhya (chapter six) as well as chapters on specific means of knowledge such as testimony (*śabda*—chapter fourteen) and comparison (*upamāna*—chapter eleven). Since the historical scope of Jayarāśi's critique is so wide, it's more difficult to define the target of his critique in historical terms.[17] It makes more sense to ask what it is that these diverse schools have in common. In chapter 5, I'll be more precise about the specific philosophical core that serves as the underlying target of Jayarāśi's critique of *pramāṇavāda* (epistemology).

Jayarāśi's skepticism is more straightforward than Nāgārjuna's. Perhaps as a Cārvāka, he had no need to show that his skepticism is compatible with some religious praxis or doctrines; in fact, he doesn't even claim to ultimately accept *Cārvāka* doctrines! Concerning the common Cārvāka materialist view that everything is constituted from the four material elements of Earth, Air, Water, and Fire, Jayarāśi says, "The principles of Earth, etc. are extremely well-established in the world. Even these, upon being examined, are not established. How

much less the others?" (TUS 0.2).[18] Jayarāśi's arguments are almost exclusively directed toward epistemology. In the introduction to the TUS, Jayarāśi lays out an argument that sets up the template for the remainder of the text.

> The establishment of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) is based on a true definition. And the establishment of the objects of knowledge (*prameyas*) is based on the means of knowledge. When that [true definition] does not exist, then how could those two (i.e., the means and the object of knowledge) be the subject of everyday practice toward existing things? (TUS 0.3)[19]

This argument can be made more precise by construing the premises as biconditional statements and rephrasing the last sentence from a rhetorical question into a conclusion:

> One can establish the *pramāṇas* if and only if one can establish a definition of the *pramāṇas*. One can establish the *prameyas* if and only if one can establish the *pramāṇas*. Therefore, if one cannot establish a definition, then one cannot establish either the *pramāṇas* or the *prameyas*.[20]

This argument is logically valid and the goal of the TUS is to establish that it is sound by showing that the antecedent of the conclusion is true (i.e., that the definitions of *pramāṇas* cannot be established), which would then show that neither the *pramāṇas* nor the *prameyas* can be established.[21] In this way, Jayarāśi aims to demonstrate the futility of epistemology itself.

In the next chapter I will discuss parts of the TUS in which Jayarāśi argues against the epistemological theories of the Buddhists Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, but it should be noted that he criticizes other schools of his day just as forcefully (Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Grammarians, etc.). He doesn't have a specifically anti-Buddhist agenda. His philosophical destruction is an equal-opportunity policy.[22] The wide scope of Jayarāśi's destruction reveals three interesting features of Jayarāśi's general procedure. First, like Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa, Jayarāśi uses *prasaṅga* arguments along the lines of *vitaṇḍā* debate. He uses the commitments of his opponents to draw out the unwanted consequences (*prasaṅga*) of these views without putting forward any counter-thesis of his own. Second, Jayarāśi's arguments are *epistemological* as shown especially in the "The Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument" (see section 5.3 in the next chapter) and by the fact that his conclusions are almost

always that some thesis is not *established*, as opposed to claiming that some object of theory does not exist. Jayarāśi is not putting forward a metaphysical theory or saying that epistemologists are wrong about a particular thesis in epistemology. He is rather offering a refusal of the project of epistemology. Third, Jayarāśi intends the arguments of the TUS to work together to show that one cannot establish *anything* about the *pramāṇas* or the *prameyas*. As Stephen Phillips suggests, "the bottom line seems to be that we need not bother ourselves, according to Jayarāśi, with what philosophers have to say, and should go on with our lives" (Phillips 1995, 73).

Readers may hear echoes of the materialist and Sañjayan strains of skepticism discussed in chapter 1. Like materialists such as Ajita Kesakambalin in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, Jayarāśi does not accept the benefits of a religious life, although, as his introduction indicates, he doesn't endorse dogmatic metaphysical materialism, either. Like Sañjaya Belatthaputta, Jayarāśi investigates an issue by setting out all possible responses and systematically rejecting each one, leaving him with no positive position whatsoever.

Some readers might object that Jayarāśi's arguments are not directed toward the general rejection of epistemology as such, but rather toward specific philosophical targets. After all, the TUS contains chapters on Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Buddhism, Sāṃkhya, and so forth, but no chapter on epistemology in general. Thus, my interpretation goes too far in attributing to Jayarāśi such a general attack on epistemology.

My response to this objection is that there are two reasons to attribute a general rejection of epistemology to Jayarāśi. First, the introduction of the text contains an argument template indicating Jayarāśi's general strategy, which is to show that none of the existing definitions of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) can be established. Somewhat like Pyrrhonian modes such as the Mode of Infinite Regress or the Mode of Circularity, Jayarāśi's argument in the introduction is meant to be a basic argument pattern than can be applied anytime a philosopher attempts to establish a *pramāṇa* theory. The task of the TUS is to show how this general template can be applied to the most popular philosophical schools of the day, but I can see no reason why Jayarāśi would not apply the same template to any other proposed definition of *pramāṇas*. In the classical Indian context of debate, there is a pressure to present a specific opponent's views (the *pūrvapakṣa*), and Jayarāśi usually critiques specific views of other philosophers. But it is worth noting that Jayarāśi does occasionally present possible views that probably have no specific proponent for the sake of filling in the logical space of possible positions. This shows that his philosophical procedure is intended to operate beyond any specific

theory in epistemology. If one were to ask Jayarāśi what he's rebelling against, he may well reply, "What've you got?"

Second, my interpretation of Jayarāśi as a skeptic about philosophy, especially epistemology, makes more sense of the text as a whole. If Jayarāśi had some specific epistemological quibble with the schools he critiques, one would expect him at some point to explain what these specific quibbles are. Instead, however, one finds Jayarāśi using a particular point against one school and then later in the text making the opposite point against another school. For instance, in arguing against the Naiyāyikas, he says that universals can't exist (TUS 1.13a2) and a few chapters later he also rejects the Buddhist rejection of universals (TUS 4.25d). It might seem that he is simultaneously denying and affirming the existence of universals. But consider the following explanation by Eli Franco:

> Unless we want to affirm that they are simple contradictions and that the man is a fool, something like the following explanation has to be accepted: Jayarāśi affirms statements incompatible with his opponent's view, and which he thinks the opponent cannot refute without getting himself into trouble. . . . While dealing with different theories, Jayarāśi makes different statements in the different corresponding contexts. . . . Thus all affirmations of Jayarāśi's, whether they are expressed in a positive or in a negative form, should be understood as negations of their opposite, which do not affirm anything at all. (Franco 1984, 128–129)

While Jayarāśi doesn't make the distinction between *prasajya* and *paryudāsa* negation, Jayarāśi's negations should be understood as *prasajya* negations, meaning that his negations do not accept the presuppositions of his opponents; I explained this type of negation in the introduction and chapter 3.[23] Since Jayarāśi uses *prasajya* negations, his denial of various epistemological theories does not imply that he himself holds some alternative theory.

While Phillips (1995, 73) has lamented the "unprincipled" nature of Jayarāśi's skepticism in that he has no ultimate philosophical point, as a skeptic about philosophy, being unprincipled is the point: Jayarāśi does not offer any ultimate philosophical illumination but rather an escape from any such attempt. If Jayarāśi had some principled philosophical point, his text would be quite puzzling, if not entirely incoherent. But if you look at him as a skeptic about philosophy who uses any available means for the purpose of undermining philosophers' confidence in their theories, his eclectic strategies make perfect sense. One would expect to find different

strategies employed for different arguments—you need the right tool for each job. This would be more effective in serving the ultimate goal of overturning philosophical impulses.

Another possible objection to my interpretation is that the TUS tells us almost nothing about what Jayarāśi wants to accomplish with all these *prasaṅgas*, so my interpretation goes far beyond the available textual evidence. First of all, I admit that Jayarāśi says little about his intentions, but we can glean something from his introduction and from a provocative statement near the end of the text, which I will discuss in the next section. Second, the TUS is not all that unusual among classical Indian texts in being amenable to multiple interpretations. Nāgārjuna's MMK is perhaps the most conspicuous example, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. While Jayarāśi's TUS has not received a panoply of interpretations that the MMK has received, I don't think that simple citations of textual evidence are going to give a definitive answer about how to interpret the TUS any more than doing so helps with Nāgārjuna. We need to appeal to other criteria, such as the principle of charity. While it is possible to read Jayarāśi as an epistemological skeptic who concludes that all knowledge claims are invalid, the problem with this interpretation is that it leaves Jayarāśi with no response to an obvious charge that he is inconsistent or self-contradictory. Reading Jayarāśi as a skeptic about philosophy is more charitable, since it makes sense of what look like flatly contradictory statements and it gives him a response to the inconsistency objection.

Some readers might wonder whether Jayarāśi could be compared more favorably with contemporary varieties of anti-realist critiques of traditional epistemology; rather than a skeptic, perhaps Jayarāśi is really an anti-realist critic of realist epistemology. This would be to see Jayarāśi along similar lines as the anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna.

Although I argued against an anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna in the previous chapters, I admit that anti-realism makes a certain amount of sense with regard to phase one of Nāgārjuna's procedure. However, Jayarāśi doesn't have anything resembling the positive philosophical intentions of Nāgārjuna's phase one. Jayarāśi does make one brief statement about the results of his philosophical destruction, but there is nothing in the TUS that corresponds to Nāgārjuna's endorsement of emptiness; there is simply no part of the TUS that could be construed as a positive endorsement of an anti-realist epistemology. Granted, my interpretation also goes beyond the text just as an anti-realist interpretation of Jayarāśi would, but I make charitable sense of the text without importing a positive epistemological theory into an almost wholly negative text. Given the

generally negative thrust of the text, I suspect Jayarāśi would critique an anti-realist epistemology just as forcefully as he would critique any other epistemology, although of course we have no way of knowing what an eighth- or ninth-century philosopher would say about developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It could be that Jayarāśi would delight in contemporary developments and change his destructive ways, but I find it more likely that Jayarāśi would place anti-realism on his list of theories to be demolished.

While I have been influenced by the work of other scholars (I am particularly indebted to Eli Franco's groundbreaking work), I think my interpretation is unique in identifying the target and scope of Jayarāśi's skepticism. Franco, for instance, doesn't distinguish Jayarāśi's skepticism from epistemological skepticism; he defines skepticism as "a philosophical attitude which consists of doubting knowledge claims in all areas" (Franco 1994, 1). Other scholars have maintained that Jayarāśi has some positive views. For instance, Piotr Balcerowicz claims that Jayarāśi actually denied the existence of universals and that it is possible that "what Jayarāśi had in mind was that for all our practical activities . . . the world of our actions . . . is 'here and now' and retains its ultimate validity, even though we are incapable of its proper philosophical analysis" (Balcerowicz 2016, sec. 2.3). Also, Shuchita Mehta claims that Jayarāśi affirms that "no verbal expressions can grasp the 'Tattva'" (Mehta 2010, xvi).

On the contrary, I have argued that Jayarāśi is not a global epistemological skeptic and does not make any philosophical claims. Rather, he is a skeptic about philosophy with a particular emphasis on epistemology in the tradition stretching back to early Indian philosophy. His targets are not as far as I can tell so wide as "knowledge claims in all areas." Neither does he discuss a lack of certainty in everyday or scientific matters, nor does he make any positive philosophical claims, even about the limits of human knowledge or what lies beyond such knowledge. Instead, the targets of his negative arguments are the philosophical schools of his day. As a skeptical Cārvāka, he sees a connection between his critique of epistemology and the Cārvāka critique of religious views.

While I have argued that Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi have a similar skeptical attitude as pillars in the Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy, there is a major difference in that the point of Nāgārjunian skepticism is to overcome attachment to philosophical views, which is in line with the Buddhist goal of overcoming suffering that arises from attachment. Jayarāśi, however, is not a Buddhist. The point of Jayarāśian skepticism is to overcome epistemology, which was often used in classical India to bolster religious worldviews (including Buddhism). Jayarāśi hopes to be free, not from *saṃsāra*,

but from the epistemological dogmatism that detracts from one's enjoyment of everyday life. Therefore, Jayarāśi expands our understanding of Indian skepticism by exemplifying a uniquely Cārvāka form of skepticism.

To sum up this section, we should read Jayarāśi as a skeptic about philosophy (especially epistemology) for three reasons. First, my interpretation makes sense of the observation that the template in the introduction of the TUS can be applied to *pramāṇa* theories more generally. Second, it is a more charitable interpretation in that it makes sense of the text without attributing to Jayarāśi obvious problems of inconsistency. Third, skepticism about epistemology makes more sense of the negative character of the TUS than would any sort of interpretation that attributes to Jayarāśi a positive theory in epistemology. In addition to these reasons in its favor, my interpretation adds to our understanding of Indian philosophy; while I rely on the work of previous scholars, my interpretation is unique in how I identify the target and scope of Jayarāśi's skepticism and its place in classical Indian philosophy, especially with regard to Jayarāśi's place within the tradition of skepticism about philosophy.

I am willing to give Jayarāśi the benefit of the doubt that he is not the inconsistent buffoon a casual reading of the TUS might suggest. Jayarāśi is up to something interesting after all, but the TUS is not a constructive work of philosophical system building. That is simply not his intention.

4.3 Jayarāśian Contextualism

While Jayarāśi's aim is not to construct new epistemological theories, we are perhaps able to talk about knowledge or cognitions at the level of everyday practice (*vyavahāra*). Jayarāśi ends the TUS with a rare positive statement, which explains the possible result of his philosophical destruction: "When, in this way, the principles are entirely destroyed, all everyday practices are made delightful, because they are not deliberated" (TUS 14.5).[24] Maybe there is no problem with our quotidian pretheoretical opinions about what it means to know or cognize things. Perhaps problems only arise when we encroach into philosophical terrain.

My inspiration for this suggestion comes from contextualism in contemporary epistemology, which is based on the idea that knowledge is somehow relative to context. This can be construed in several ways. For David Annis, justification is relative (Annis 1978). For Michael Williams, knowledge is relative to its specific domain of inquiry (Williams 1996; 2004). The most common type of

contextualism, which I call semantic contextualism, claims that *ascriptions* of knowledge, such as "S knows that P," are context sensitive. Since this is an epistemological theory about ascriptions of knowledge, I'll call this "semantic contextualism in epistemology" to distinguish it from forms of contextualism about language more generally. Stewart Cohen (2000), Keith DeRose (1995), and David Lewis (1999) are prominent defenders of semantic contextualism in epistemology. Cohen explains: "the truth value of sentences containing the words 'know' and its cognates will depend on contextually determined standards" and these standards are the "contexts of ascription" which "vary depending on things like the purposes, intentions, expectations, presuppositions, etc., of the speakers who utter these sentences" (Cohen 2000, 94). To say "Sally knows that she has hands" is true when uttered in normal everyday contexts, but false when uttered in contexts such as a philosophy classroom in which skepticism is discussed. This transformation results from the standards used in the context of the discussion; the standards are set by the discussants, although not necessarily explicitly. Semantic contextualism in epistemology is presented as a way to make sense of external-world skepticism without letting it have too much impact in regular life.

I should distinguish semantic contextualism in epistemology from other kinds of contextualism. The contextualist epistemology Westerhoff (2010) wants to attribute to Nāgārjuna is closer to Michael Williams's issue contextualism in which knowledge is relative to a specific issue or subject that structures a context of inquiry, although Williams does not endorse semantic or metaphysical anti-realism (Williams 1996, ch. 6).[25] The difference here is that Williams and Westerhoff's Nāgārjuna see as many contexts as there are contexts of inquiry (e.g., a context for astronomy, a context for epistemology, a context for musical theory, a context for zoology, etc.); however, semantic contextualism in epistemology requires only two contexts: epistemology and regular life outside epistemology.

While Jayarāśi wouldn't accept semantic contextualism as an epistemological theory, perhaps we can make sense of his remarks about everyday practice (*vyavahāra*) by appealing to the distinction between the contexts of epistemology and regular life that lies at the heart of semantic contextualism in epistemology. If one goes down the rabbit hole of epistemology, one will see that the whole enterprise of establishing *pramāṇas* is futile. If one avoids epistemology, then perhaps there is no problem at all—one can go on discussing knowledge in an everyday context. In the context of epistemology, epistemology self-destructs; in the context of everyday practice, there is no need for epistemology.

Since using epistemic terms is usually thought of as part of everyday practice, it's likely that Jayarāśi himself would continue to use such terms as long as he's in the everyday context. Jayarāśi might utter both of the following sentences:

1. "It is not the case that Devadatta has a perception of a cup." [in the context of epistemology]
2. "Devadatta sees a cup." [in the context of everyday practice]

While it initially appears that these sentences directly contradict each other (since seeing is a variety of perception), there is no contradiction, because the two sentences are uttered in different contexts. From within the context of epistemology, Jayarāśi would fail to adequately define epistemic terms like "perception" (*pratyakṣa*) within the philosophical framework given by his opponents; thus, it turns out that poor Devadatta doesn't—at least by the standards of the *pramāṇavādins*—have a genuine perception of a cup. Keep in mind, also, that the negation in statement one is a *prasajya* or non-implicational propositional negation, so it remains the case that Jayarāśi never affirms anything in the context of epistemology. In the context of everyday practice, however, Jayarāśi very well might utter the sentence, "Devadatta sees a cup," using "sees" in its everyday sense with no attempt at deeper epistemological inquiry.

This comparison helps to explain Jayarāśi's citation of the following saying: "Regarding worldly everyday practice, a fool and a philosopher (*paṇḍita*) are similar" (TUS 0.1).[26] In the everyday context, whether one is a fool or a sophisticated philosopher (*paṇḍita*) makes no difference; in fact, the theories of philosophers undermine themselves within a philosophical context.

4.4 A Contextualist Response to the Inconsistency Objection

The strongest reason to see Jayarāśi as embodying contextualism is that this would help him respond to the age-old objection that skepticism is inconsistent or self-refuting, which is one of the most common objections raised against philosophers such as Sextus, Nāgārjuna, and Jayarāśi. John Koller states the charge against Jayarāśi clearly: "The skeptic's paradox is this: If he does not know that the evidence for knowledge claims is inadequate, he has no reasons for his skepticism. But if he does know, then he clearly accepts (operationally, at least) a satisfiable criterion of adequate evidence, and, to this extent is not a skeptic" (Koller 1977, 158). Jayarāśi is in

danger of falling into a trap in which either his conclusion is entirely irrational and should have no effect on us, or it is blatantly self-refuting such that the truth of the conclusion that no *pramāṇas* can be established implies its own falsity, since some means of knowledge must be established in order to show that no means of knowledge can be established. Can Jayarāśi avoid this trap?

I think Jayarāśi can answer to this charge, which was also leveled by classical Indian philosophers.[27] First, Jayarāśi uses a *vitaṇḍā* style of argumentation, which is merely criticizing an opponent's thesis without putting forward a counter-thesis. As discussed in chapter 1 (section 1.5), in the *Nyāya Sūtra vitaṇḍā* is distinguished from friendly discussion (*vāda*) and disputation (*jalpa*). *Vitaṇḍā* is a subset of *jalpa*: "*Vitaṇḍā* is that [*jalpa*], which is without the establishing of a counter-position" (NS 1.2.3).[28] Jayarāśi is a *vaitaṇḍika* revealing the groundlessness of his opponents' theses without positing a claim of his own. There is no self-refutation, because Jayarāśi does not enter a positive claim in the epistemological context to contradict his negative claims in that context.[29]

Secondly, both Western and Indian skeptics often use language in a way that differs from the usual philosophical mode. For instance, Sextus Empiricus claims to have no beliefs, and Nāgārjuna purports to establish no thesis (PH 1.7; VV 29). A common way to make sense of these seemingly nonsensical statements is to interpret the goal of Sextus and Nāgārjuna as a sort of therapy meant to induce a reaction in the reader.[30] Skeptics need not use language for the purpose of establishing theses and supporting substantive beliefs; to hold skeptics to those standards constitutes a hermeneutic error. An argument is usually thought of as a set of statements meant to support another statement, which is the conclusion, and a statement is defined as a claim that something is either true or false. Skeptics about philosophy are not proffering arguments in *that* sense, because they are not ultimately employing statements put forward as truth-claims. The goal is not to support a conclusion, but rather to stop supporting philosophical conclusions.[31] In both Indian and Western philosophy, the charge of self-refutation "is mainly due to a misunderstanding of the sceptic's use of language and his frame of mind" (Franco 1994, 37).[32] This answer to the charge of self-refutation explains how Jayarāśi could say *anything* about philosophical topics in a philosophical context given his skepticism about philosophy. He is free to use language to make arguments in a philosophical context without thereby committing himself to acceptance of any counter-thesis or opposing theory.[33] Furthermore, a form of contextualism might explain how he might use epistemic concepts in a regular context without contradicting his vehement rejection of any such

concepts in the context of epistemology.

Here one might object that there is a contradiction in my interpretation. Versions of contextualism, whatever else they may be, seem to be epistemological theories. Hence, I have attributed a contextualist epistemological theory to Jayarāśi while simultaneously denying that he accepts any epistemological theory. Far from answering the charge of self-refutation, the contextualist move deepens the problem.

The problem with this objection is that it assumes I am claiming that Jayarāśi actually accepts a contextualist theory of knowledge, as contemporary proponents of semantic contextualism clearly do. But I have not claimed that Jayarāśi accepts any version of contextualism. I am not claiming that he endorses any semantic theory about epistemic terms; in fact, he would likely reject such a claim much as he rejects other epistemological claims.[34] Rather, my claim is that a two-tiered sort of contextualism can help us make sense of Jayarāśi's philosophical practice. We can see him as *embodying* a sort of contextualism rather than arguing for it: in epistemological contexts, he accepts nothing (not even contextualism), but in regular contexts, he may accept some everyday knowledge claims.

Toward this end, Jayarāśi may have been inspired by certain elements in the larger Cārvāka tradition. According to Mādhava's *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, it was the standard Cārvāka opinion that activity in the world does not rest on philosophically established inferences (SDS, p. 4). According to Purandara-type Cārvākas everyday practice requires only a type of inference that is "well-established in the world" (*lokaprasiddham*), but does not require the use of transempirical inferences.[35] Another intriguing idea that Jayanta's *Nyāyamañjarī* attributes to the "well-educated Cārvākas" (*suśikṣitacārvāka*) is the view that "the determination of the number of *pramāṇas* is not possible."[36] Assuming these texts give more-or-less accurate accounts of ideas that had been prevalent among Cārvākas for some time, the notion that one can act in the world in the absence of certain kinds of philosophically established beliefs was probably familiar to Jayarāśi as was the idea that the epistemological task of determining the number and nature of *pramāṇas* may be impossible. Jayarāśi pushes these ideas further to eliminate epistemologically established perceptions and, indeed, epistemological justifications of any kind.

4.5 How to Stop Worrying and Love a Life without

Philosophy or Religion

Jayarāśi is not denying that anyone really knows anything, as would a global epistemological skeptic. Rather, he is inviting us to stop worrying about whether anyone really knows anything, which, along with his use of *prasaṅga* arguments in the *vitaṇḍā* debate form, cements him firmly in the Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy stretching back to early Indian philosophy through Nāgārjuna and forward to Śrī Harṣa. In particular, Jayarāśi expands Cārvāka irreligiousness to a suspicion about the possibility of epistemological theory. His skepticism serves his Cārvāka sympathies. As Franco puts it, "in spite of the enormous differences in ontology and theory of knowledge, in ethical matters and in anti-clerical attitude, which formed the hard core of the Lokāyata, Jayarāśi remained a true heir of Bṛhaspati" (Franco 1994, 47).

Is Jayarāśi's therapy meant for intellectuals with philosophical training or for anyone with philosophical impulses?[37] Jayarāśi's contextualist point is that in regular, everyday life we simply don't need philosophy to get along and once you start doing philosophy, it subverts itself (although you may need a skeptic to demonstrate this). Although those with training in the schools of classical Indian philosophy are the specific targets of Jayarāśi's destruction, Jayarāśi-style *prasaṅga* arguments could be raised against any theory with philosophical pretensions. However, Jayarāśi's immediate targets are scholastic, professional philosophers and anyone who uses their efforts to support a religious worldview. This fits well with his Cārvāka tendencies and is entirely in line with what I take to be the true criterion for Cārvāka membership, namely, that his work contributes to the pursuit of an irreligious way of life.

A Jayarāśian life would not be baldly anti-intellectual, for Jayarāśi displays a keen philosophical intellect and familiarity with the sophisticated philosophical theories of his day. Yet he does quote the fragment mentioned earlier: "Regarding worldly everyday practice, a fool and a philosopher are similar" (TUS 0.1). Are a fool and a philosopher the same?

Philosophers who begin in the earnest search for truth may be initially troubled by their inability to establish philosophical theories. Following Jayarāśi's destruction to its end may lead one to develop a particular attitude toward philosophical speculation. It would be self-contradictory to say (in a philosophical context) that one knows that philosophical theorizing is a hopeless task, but it may be that going through the rapturous route of Jayarāśian destruction leaves one without a taste for constructive philosophy or any impulse to indulge in this activity. Why *build* theories when *destroying* them is so much

fun? But I don't think Jayarāśi's destructive tendencies are all fun and games. He raises a serious question about whether philosophy leads to a good life. Through his delightful destruction, he shows us how to stop worrying about philosophy and love a life without it. And this attitude can only be fully appreciated after going through the purgative therapy, just as one can only fully appreciate the paradoxicality of a paradox by trying to solve it. Skepticism about philosophy is, strangely enough, an attitude only fully available to philosophers (or perhaps recovering philosophers). This full appreciation is one sense in which such a skeptic would be different than a person who simply never considers philosophical problems. The fool and the Jayarāśian philosopher are slightly different not in knowledge or wisdom, but in the timbres of their attitudes. To say that Jayarāśian skeptics "realize" or "know" that philosophical contexts are bankrupt misses the point. Jayarāśi points to a situation in which one can be happy by eschewing any attempt to "realize" or "know" things in a philosophically robust manner, by being content to enjoy life without the need for epistemological justification.

It is worth noting that Jayarāśi never explicitly refers to any sort of insight or illumination—mystical, philosophical, or otherwise. In the absence of such language, his statement, "all everyday practices are made delightful, because they are not deliberated" (TUS 14.5), should be read as purely descriptive. He is describing the state of mind that might follow his philosophical destruction, but he is not giving any normative argument in favor of his approach. While the gerundive form *ramaṇīya*, which I have translated as "delightful," could be translated as "should be enjoyed" (which sounds normative in English), either translation is acceptable (Monier-Williams 1994, 868). In the absence of any explicit normative argument, a more descriptive nuance makes more sense.

It is helpful to compare Jayarāśi to what some have claimed is the descriptive nature of Pyrrhonism. R. J. Hankinson describes Sextus's attitude.

> Sextus does not, at the basic level, offer an argument for a way of life, or try to convince us that it is the better one. . . . What he does is describe a condition, and a response to it. If you recognize the condition, then you may be helped by the response. If you don't, well maybe you don't really have it, or maybe you are simply indulging in denial—either way the Pyrrhonist cannot help you. And in particular to the person who says that he sees nothing attractive in the Pyrrhonian way of life, the Pyrrhonist has, appropriately, nothing whatsoever to say. (Hankinson 1995, 308)

Sextus describes the nature of his practice in detail in Book One of the PH, while Jayarāśi is far less explicit on this subject. Jayarāśi may well have some dismissive, mocking words for those who disagree with his way of life. However, I think it makes sense to emphasize the descriptive, as opposed to normative, nature of what we might call (for lack of a better term) Jayarāśi's positive program. It could be that Jayarāśi has some sort of normative argument, but simply neglected to spell it out. It's also possible that he thinks the demolition of his opponents' views gives a normative argument in that it leaves readers with nowhere else to go. But here I appeal to the generally negative character of the text. Having spent over one hundred pages of densely packed Sanskrit attempting to demolish every *pramāṇa* theory he could think of, it's hard to see how Jayarāśi *could* give a positive, normative argument for a way of life—on what basis would such an argument rest? While it's possible he has some sort of method of illumination outside of the *pramāṇas*, he never explains it or hints at anything of the kind. For these reasons, Jayarāśi's statements about everyday life in the absence of epistemological theory should be read as purely descriptive statements.

All of this perhaps sounds strange to the majority of contemporary philosophers. It sounds strange to me. However, it's worth considering that skeptics such as Sextus and Jayarāśi might be a good deal happier than those who stake their happiness on the coherent establishment of some philosophical or religious worldview. Jayarāśi describes a situation in which the refusal of religion, by way of destroying the epistemological theories used to establish religious doctrines, can lead to a happy life. Contrary to the contemporary notion of skepticism as a threatening cloud hanging on the horizon of our cognitive lives, Jayarāśi, much like Sextus, Nāgārjuna, and Śrī Harṣa, demonstrates that a skeptical life just might be a life worth living.

4.6 Conclusion

I have argued that Jayarāśi should be read as a skeptic about philosophy and as one of the three pillars of a classical Indian tradition of such skepticism with roots in early Indian thought, especially in the materialist and Sañjayan strains. I also hope to have shown that the study of Cārvāka and skepticism about philosophy can increase our understanding of classical Indian thought. Jayarāśi is important in this process, since he is both a Cārvāka and a skeptic. I argued that my interpretation makes the best sense of the text, an argument that will be enhanced in the next chapter by looking at more specific examples from the TUS. By comparison with the

contemporary semantic contextualism in epistemology, I argued that Jayarāśi can be fruitfully interpreted as denying that epistemology is possible, but nonetheless allowing himself to engage in everyday contexts of epistemic activity. Lastly, I offered some suggestions about how my interpretation makes sense of Jayarāśi as a Cārvāka skeptic.

Of course, Jayarāśi does not tell us much about what he intends his labyrinthine *prasaṅga* arguments to accomplish. However, as I will demonstrate via specific examples in the next chapter, I offer a coherent, charitable interpretation of the text. In doing so, I am showing how Jayarāśi inspires us to ask questions about the place of skepticism about philosophy in the classical Indian tradition in particular and in epistemology more generally. At the very least, I have been inspired by Jayarāśi to consider a unique kind of skepticism about philosophy that offers much of interest for those of us who, like Jayarāśi, have naturalist and skeptical sympathies combined with a suspicion that philosophy itself may offer far fewer answers than most philosophers suppose, a point to which I shall return in the conclusion of this book.

In the next chapter I delve into the specific details of Jayarāśi's interaction with the epistemological theories of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, which will demonstrate how the general interpretation I have developed in this chapter makes sense of specific arguments in the TUS. Doing so will show how Jayarāśi argues in a *vitaṇḍā* style of pure criticism with no counter-thesis, and that Jayarāśi's arguments are intended to undermine the very idea of epistemology, just as one would expect from a skeptic about philosophy.

NOTES

1. Jayarāśi's dates, like the dates of most classical Indian philosophers, are difficult to ascertain. This date is from Franco (1994, xi). For more details on attempts to date Jayarāśi, see Sanghavi and Parikh (1987, iv–xi), Franco (1994, 9–15), and Balcerowicz (2016). Balcerowicz puts the TUS somewhere between 800 and 840 CE.

2. Some of the ideas and interpretations in this and the next chapter were originally published in Mills (2015a), although they have been somewhat altered and repackaged here. I thank *Philosophy East and West* for permission to reuse these ideas in the present work.

3. This is based on Perrett (2016). See the introduction for details.

4. John Taber (2005, xi) suggests that we might view *pramāṇavāda* as a single debate in which multiple schools took part.

5. For a general distinction between skepticism about philosophy and epistemological skepticism, see the introduction (section 0.2).

6. There is controversy about whether this text is an authentically Cārvāka text, but I take the side that it is. Both the controversy and my opinion about it will be

detailed in this chapter.

7. For example, see Ṛg *Veda*, 8.89, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1), and the *Pāyāsi Sutta* (DN 23). See chapter 1 of this book for more examples. Akbar's advisor Abu Fazl reports that Cārvākas were present at Akbar's meetings on religious topics (Sen 2005, 25, 288–289).

8. The main critique of inference is that there is no way to establish the pervasion (*vyāpti*) of the proof (*sādhana*) and that which is to be proved (*sādhya*). It cannot be perceived, since one cannot perceive the future and the past. It cannot be inferred or known by testimony (*śabda*), since either of those options would constitute an infinite regress (*anavasthā*). Furthermore, the notion of a special cause or extraneous condition (*upādhi*) creates a problem. A stock example of an *upādhi* is wet fuel as a cause of smoke rather than merely fire. It is not just fire that causes smoke, since fire using dry fuel or fire in a red-hot iron ball does not produce smoke. The presence of this *upādhi* (wet fuel) is what accounts for the invalidity of the inference, "there is smoke on the mountain, because there is fire on the mountain." A true pervasion (*vyāpti*) must consist of a necessary connection (*avinābhāva*), which means one must rule out any *upādhis*. (See Gangopadhyay (1971) for a detailed treatment of *upādhi* in Nyāya.) According to the Cārvāka position in SDS, one cannot know that there is a necessary connection, because one would have to know the absence of *upādhis*. Knowing the absence of *upādhis* is problematic, since cognizing an *upādhi* would require cognizing the *vyāpti* and cognizing the *vyāpti* would require cognizing the *upādhi*. Hence, there is the fallacy of mutual dependence (*parasparāśraya*) and a successful inference can never be proved. Lastly, there is an account of successful activity without inference: "Activity with regard to a cognition of fire and so forth immediately following a cognition of 'smoky' (*dhūmra*), etc., is made possible (*yujyate*) by error or by being based on perception" (*dhūmrādijñānānantaram agnyādijñāne pravṛttiḥ pratyakṣamūlatayā bhrāntyā vā yujyate*. SDS, p. 4). For the full critique of inference, see SDS, p. 3–4. See Phillips (2012, 56) for discussion of the Nyāya response.

9. For instance, see Riepe (1961), Chattopadhyaya (1973), Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya (1990), King (1999), Krishna (1997), Kar (2013), and Gokhale (2015).

10. Pradeep Gokhale reconstructs Purandara's view that answers objections leveled at the perception-only view and avoids accepting transempirical uses of inference (Gokhale 1993). Gokhale (2015) defends a complex "pluralist" view of the Cārvāka tradition according to which Cārvākas defended at least four kinds of epistemological views, three sorts of ontological views, and three varieties of ethical views (Gokhale 2015, 6–9).

11. *tadanabhyupagacchato 'pi cārvākamādhyamikāder vāgvistarāṇāṃ pratīyamānatvāt*. KhKh, p. 7. See Solomon (1959) for a comparative study of Jayarāśi and Śrī Harṣa. This quote also suggests that Śrī Harṣa was aware of similarities between his own methods and those of some earlier Mādhyamikas and Cārvākas.

12. References to Jayarāśi by Jain philosophers and others are discussed in Sanghavi and Parikh (1987, iii–xi).

13. Franco discusses Bhāsarvajña's treatment of Jayarāśi in great detail in an appendix entitled "Bhāsarvajña and Jayarāśi: The Refutation of Scepticism in the *Nyāyabhūṣana*" (Franco 1994, 553–586).

14. For examples of mentions of Jayarāśi, see King (1999, 19) and Ganeri (2001a, 27–28). Phillips discusses Jayarāśi in some detail *vis-à-vis* Jayarāśi's influence on Śrī Harṣa (Phillips 1995, 71–74). Gokhale (2015, Ch. 2), focuses on

Cārvāka skepticism with Jayarāśi as the example. There are, nonetheless, some in-depth studies including Eli Franco's several excellent works (1983; 1984; 1994) and a few treatments by Dilipkumar Mohanta (1989; 1990; 2009). In recent years there have also been two new translations of the TUS (Jayarāśi 2010; 2013).

15. Chattopadhyaya, for instance, denies that Jayarāśi is a Cārvāka on precisely these grounds, claiming that the work is mere extreme skepticism (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya 1990, 491) and at another point that it may be an idealist work (Franco 1994, xii). Ramkrishna Bhattacharya makes another attempt, quite strained in my opinion, to give evidence that Jayarāśi was not a Cārvāka in that he refers to Bṛhaspati as "Lord" (*bhagavān*) and as "preceptor of the gods" (*suraguru*) (TUS, p. 45; p. 125; Bhattacharya 2002, 629 n. 43). Here I think Jayarāśi could simply be facetious or satirical as he often is elsewhere. Also, the "*bhagavān*" could simply be a term of respect and is directly followed by a quote denying the existence of another world (*paraloka*). "*Suraguru*" is an epithet for Bṛhaspati (Monier-Williams 1994, 1234); using this name need not imply the existence of the divine any more than using the name "Devadatta." For more discussion of arguments claiming that Jayarāśi cannot be a Cārvāka, see Franco (1994), xi–xiii and Werner (1995) (the latter is a critical review of Franco 1994).

16. Jayatilleke also views Jayarāśi as a representative of one branch of Cārvāka. He claims that he is "an absolute nihilist in his metaphysics though he may be called a logical sceptic in so far as he is sceptical of (i.e., doubts or denies) the possibility of knowledge" (Jayatilleke 1963, 82). According to Jayatilleke, while Jayarāśi's arguments are mostly epistemological, chapter eight of the TUS, which is on the soul, shows that Jayarāśi also has a nihilist metaphysical agenda. However, Jayatilleke sees Jayarāśi as a "pragmatic materialist," since he recommends materialism on quotidian, not metaphysical, grounds (Jayatilleke 1963, 82–91). Richard King suggests that, "we should consider the possibility that Jayarāśi was in actual fact a sceptic with Lokāyata sympathies" (King 1999, 19). The question here is whether Jayarāśi was a skeptic first and Cārvāka second or vice versa, a question Stephen Phillips also considers (Phillips 1994, 71–73). It may be best to take Daya Krishna's advice to take the schools of Indian philosophy as "styles of thought which are developed by successive thinkers, and not fully exemplified by any" (Krishna 1997, 13). On Krishna's view, Indian schools should be seen as "schools" of Western philosophy such as empiricism or idealism. Just as Berkeley is both an empiricist and an idealist, why can we not see Jayarāśi as both a Cārvāka and a skeptic?

17. Although I don't think this should dissuade us from trying to identify historical targets of Jayarāśi's specific arguments, as Franco (1994) has done so thoroughly. For an excellent overview of the *pramāṇa* tradition, see Mohanty (1992).

18. *pṛthivyādīni tattvāni loke prasiddhāni. tāny api vicāryamāṇāni na vyavatiṣṭhante. kiṃ punar anyāni?* TUS 0.2. Note: The numbers given for citations of the TUS correspond to Franco's numbering system for the Sanskrit text based on subjects discussed (Franco 1994, 55). Where page numbers are given, I am citing the page numbers from the 1987 Sanghavi and Parikh edition.

19. *sallakṣaṇanibandhanaṃ mānavyavasthānam. mānanibandhanā ca meyasthitiḥ. tadabhāve tayoḥ sadvyavahāraviṣayatvaṃ kathaṃ.* TUS 0.3.

20. Enthusiasts of logic might want this symbolized. Let N = establish *pramāṇas*, Y = establish *prameyas*, and D = establish definition. P1, N↔D. P2, Y↔N. C: ~D→~(N v Y). I'm not entirely sure that my conclusion fits the Sanskrit "*sadvyavahāraviṣayatvaṃ*." I suspect that "being the subject of everyday practice toward existing things," "being talked about as real" (Franco 1994, 69–71), or

being “taken as object of correct expression and practical behaviour” (Solomon 2010, 3) all amount to something like being established (*vyavasthānam*, *sthitiḥ*, etc.). Jayarāśi’s idea is that if the *pramāṇas* cannot be defined, it does us no good to engage in everyday practice (*vyavahāra*) with regard to them. The word “*vyavahāra*” includes “thinking, speaking and acting” (Franco 1994, 302 n. 10) and comes from the root √*vyavhṛ*, which can mean “to exchange . . . to be active or busy . . . to carry on commerce” (Monier-Williams 1994, 1034). I think of *vyavahāra* as being good enough for making business deals, or to use a contemporary idiom, being close enough for horseshoes and hand grenades.

21. One could also claim that one or both of the premises are false, which would make the argument unsound. I am not sure if these premises were widely accepted by Indian philosophers of Jayarāśi’s day or not. Alternatively, the argument would still be sound if both sides of both biconditionals were false. Since all the variables would be false, ~D and ~(N v Y) would be true, making ~D → ~(N v Y) true, but not merely vacuously true. Since Jayarāśi means to deny D, N, and Y, this would seem to be his take on it.

22. Nonetheless, Jayarāśi does not spend equal time criticizing every school. Vedāntins and Jains are not discussed in great detail and Madhyamaka is not mentioned at all. Jayarāśi discusses what seems to be an early pre-Śaṅkara version of Vedānta in the chapter on the soul (TUS, p. 81) and he refutes the Jain theories of the soul (TUS, p. 76–79), but spends little effort on the epistemological doctrines of either school. There is an affinity between Jayarāśi and Madhyamaka in style of argument and, at least with regard to Nāgārjuna, in the general attitude of skepticism. Perhaps Jayarāśi simply did not feel the need to criticize a school so similar to himself, although Jayarāśi would reject the Buddhist religious aspects of Madhyamaka. It is also possible, as Hayes has argued (Hayes 1994), that Madhyamaka was simply never a popular or philosophically important school in classical India. Of course, why Jayarāśi chose to criticize the schools he did remains a matter of speculation. It could very well be that these were simply the schools with which he was familiar for completely contingent personal reasons.

23. For more on *prasajya* negation, see chapter 1 (section 1.5) and chapter 3 (section 3.1).

24. Franco gives his translation of this passage in his introduction (Franco 1994, 44), and it appears in the Sanghavi and Parikh edition as follows: *tad evam upapluteṣv eva tattveṣv avicāritaramaṇīyāḥ sarve vyavahārā ghaṭanta iti* (TUS p. 125).

25. Williams argues that we should be deflationists about truth and that “metaphysical realism has no particular connection with any sceptical problems or answer to them” (Williams 1996, 266).

26. *lokavyavahāraṃ prati sadṛśau bālapaṇḍitau.* TUS 0.1. While this fragment may appear to be a Cārvāka maxim, some scholars argue that it is probably Buddhist (Bhattacharya 2002, 620; Franco 1994, 43).

27. Especially Vidyānanda and Bhāsarvajña. Vidyānanda’s critique occurs in his *Pramāṇaparīkṣa* (Franco 1994, 33). Franco discusses Bhāsarvajña’s critique in the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* in some detail (Franco 1994, 553–581).

28. *sa pratipakṣasthāpanāhīno vitaṇḍā.* NS 1.2.3. Vātsyāyana, in his *Nyāyabhāṣya*, claims that a *vaitaṇḍika* has a view, but does not put it forward during the debate: “That very thing which is said and characterized as a negation of that other [view], *that* is the view of the *vaitaṇḍika*, but it is not the case that some thing, which is this thing to be proved (*sādhya*), is established as a thesis (*pratijñā*)” (*yad vai khalu tatparapratiṣedhalakṣaṇaṃ vākyaṃ sa vaitaṇḍikasya pakṣaḥ, na tv asau kiñcid arthaṃ pratijñāya sthāpayatīti.* NBh 1.2.3). Uddyotakara, in his

Nyāyavārttika, doesn't think the *vaitaṇḍika* has a view on the subject of the debate, but he thinks the *vaitaṇḍika* accepts at least four things: "In accepting the refutation, [the *vaitaṇḍika*] admits, (1) the view to be refuted, (2) that he considers the view to be incorrect, (3) that there is a propounder [of the other view], and (4) that there is an asserter (i.e., himself)" (*dūṣaṇam abhyupagacchan dūṣyam abhyupaiti ayathārthāvabodhaṃ pratipadyate pratipādayitāraṃ pratipattāraṃ ca.* NV 1.2.3). For more on the history of the early Nyāya theory of debate, see Preisendanz (2000).

29. Jayarāśi avoids a problem Stanley Cavell raises about external-world skepticism. According to Cavell, skeptical arguments about the external world do not mean what they are purported to mean, because epistemologists put forward a claim in "a non-claim context," that is, a claim that nobody knows anything about the external world is not properly a claim at all, since such a claim "must be the investigation of a concrete claim if its procedure is to be coherent; it cannot be the investigation of a concrete claim if its conclusion is to be general" (Cavell 1979, 218–220). A skeptical claim cannot be both meaningful (where, as Wittgenstein argues, meaning must be embedded in a specific inquiry) and general (where the claim concerns knowledge as such). For Jayarāśi the fact that he is not making a positive claim is the point of his skepticism.

30. According to Michael Williams, when Sextus discusses epistemological questions he is not putting forward an epistemological theory, but rather he shows the equal convincingness of two opposing theories and "extends *epochē* into epistemology itself" (Williams 1988, 586). Adrian Kuzminski gives a similar practical interpretation of both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka: "Far from seeing self-contradiction as a defining mark of incoherence and nonsense, or as some kind of mysterious referent, Pyrrhonism and the Madhyamaka use contradictions of this sort as performative acts" (Kuzminski 2008, 64).

31. One might wonder whether such skeptics accept logic even if they do not accept philosophical theories. I see two possible answers, at least in Jayarāśi's case. First, one might think Jayarāśi must accept basic logical principles (at least the principle of non-contradiction), since a *prasaṅga* argument only works by revealing a contradiction and then rejecting the idea that engendered this contradiction. Jayarāśi rejects epistemology precisely because it leads to contradictions. On the other hand, it may be that Jayarāśi points out contradictions merely because his opponents think contradictions are to be avoided while he himself has no real opinion on the matter. He may even accept contradictions in non-philosophical contexts, all the while lampooning philosophers who think they can construct theories free from contradiction.

32. There is a similar mistake in the interpretation of Pyrrhonism, a mistake that "views the Sceptic's mental life from the standpoint of the Dogmatist, and assumes that, even after the Sceptical medicine has taken its effect, the structure of the Sceptic's assents and dissents will remain largely the same as before" (Hankinson 1995, 286).

33. Whether Jayarāśi uses language in this skeptical, uncommitted way in everyday contexts is difficult to determine. He may well use language in a straightforward way as long as he's not doing philosophy, or alternatively, he may appear to use language in a normal way in everyday contexts by saying the same things as everyone else, but in fact have a radically different attitude toward the things he says. The question is: does Jayarāśi believe what he says even in non-philosophical contexts? This is similar to the debate between "rustic" or "no belief" interpretation and the "urbane" or "some belief" interpretation of Pyrrhonism (Burnyeat and Frede 1997; Thorsrud 2009, 173–182).

34. Jayarāśi might find particular delight in a criticism by Elke Brendel (2005), who exploits a self-referential peculiarity of contextualism. Brendel argues that contextualism faces a serious problem in that "there is no context in which the contextualist can claim to know that her theory is true" (Brendel 2005, 38).

35. "*purandaras tvāḥ—'lokaprasiddham anumānaṃ cārvākair apīṣyata eva, yattu kaiścil laukikaṃ mārgam atikramyānumānam ucyate tanniṣidhyate*'" (Bhattacharya 2002, 608). Note: Bhattacharya quotes this from Kamalaśīla's *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*.

36. *aśakya eva pramāṇasaṅkhyāniyama iti suśikṣitacārvākāḥ* (Bhattacharya 2002, 609). Note: Bhattacharya quotes this from Jayanta's *Nyāyamañjarī*.

37. There is a similar question about Nāgārjuna. It seems to me that the direct targets of Nāgārjunian therapy are certain bits of scholastic theory, although such bits are built on a common human impulse: the dogmatic desire to "get things right" in some substantial sense and the tendency to cling to these theories once they are formulated. Jayarāśi has a similar outlook, although his is not tied to specific Buddhist attitudes toward desire and clinging. Tom Tillemans considers a similar question of whether the idea of *svabhāva* is a purely academic abstraction or something inherent in people's ordinary thinking (Tillemans 2007, 520–523).

Chapter 5

Jayarāśi and the Delightful Destruction of Buddhist Epistemology

> *And when this (i.e., there being two pramāṇas) is not possible, saying "There are only two pramāṇas"is the gesticulation of a fool.*
>
> —*Jayarāśi,* Tattvopaplavasiṃha *3.3a*

In the previous chapter I argued that Jayarāśi should be understood as the second of the three pillars of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy. While his skepticism draws on many of the same elements as Nāgārjuna's, especially the *prasaṅga* form of argument, he should be seen as most strongly developing the materialist and Sañjayan elements of early Indian skepticism as discussed in chapter 1. Jayarāśi's skepticism embodies a kind of contextualism: in the context of epistemology, epistemological theories self-destruct, while in the context of everyday life, there is no need for epistemology.

This chapter will show some examples of how Jayarāśi engages in this philosophical destruction. The thesis of this chapter is that applying the general interpretive framework of the previous chapter to Jayarāśi's specific arguments against the epistemological theories of the Buddhist philosophers Dignāga and Dharmakīrti further demonstrates and exemplifies Jayarāśi's membership in the tradition of skepticism about philosophy. I conceptualize the specific target of Jayarāśi's critique in terms of what contemporary epistemologist Michael Williams calls "epistemological realism," or the idea that there are such things as structures of human knowledge about which epistemologists can theorize. After showing that Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE) and Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660 CE) do in fact endorse this sort of realism (even if they don't endorse other types of realism), I give a detailed analysis of two of Jayarāśi's arguments from *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (TUS), chapter three: the Non-Establishment of Difference Argument, which ties to show that the Buddhists cannot maintain a difference between perception and inference, and the

Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument, which shows that, if the Buddhist theory that there are two mutually incompatible means of knowledge were true, one could never establish that this theory is true. I end with reflections on how these particular arguments fit within Jayarāśi's larger project of skepticism about philosophy, which makes him quite different than contemporary epistemological skeptics.

5.1 Jayarāśi's Denial of Epistemological Realism

Recall that in the introduction to the TUS, Jayarāśi presents an argument that acts as a template for the text to come.

> The establishment of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) is based on a true definition. And the establishment of the objects of knowledge (*prameyas*) is based on the means of knowledge. When that [true definition] does not exist, then how could those two (i.e., the means and the object of knowledge) be the subject of everyday practice toward existing things? (TUS 0.3)[1]

The purpose of the TUS is to show that the definitions of *pramāṇas* cannot be established, which in turn demonstrates that neither the *pramāṇas* nor the *prameyas* can be established. Jayarāśi's goal, as he explains at the end of the text, is to rid us of the need to do philosophy so that we can better enjoy our lives, a sentiment I have argued is fully in line with his status as a Cārvāka skeptic.

The direct target of Nāgārjuna's critique of epistemology is the Nyāya school (although it should be understood to apply more widely than just Nyāya). Jayarāśi's direct targets, however, comprise just about every school of philosophy of his day (see section 4.2 for a comprehensive list). As his targets are so vast and diverse, it might help to articulate a philosophical core of these various schools. Toward that end, consider what Michael Williams calls "epistemological realism." Williams defines this thesis as follows:

> Since, if human knowledge is to constitute a genuine kind of thing—and the same goes for knowledge of the external world, knowledge of other minds, and so on—there must be underlying epistemological structures or principles, the traditional epistemologist is committed to *epistemological realism*. This is not realism within epistemology—the thesis that we have knowledge of an objective, mind-independent reality—but something quite different: realism about the objects of epistemological inquiry.

(Williams 1996, 108)

Epistemological realism is the view that there are "objects of epistemological inquiry" and that such objects constitute natural kinds that can be discovered and clarified by epistemologists. One example is "knowledge of the world *as such*," or the idea of one general source for all our knowledge of the external world (Williams 1996, 103).[2] These objects are not individual objects of perception such as cups or particular cognitions, but more abstract theoretical objects that Williams, following Stanley Cavell, calls "generic objects" (Williams 2004, 192). Epistemological realism provides the framework within which epistemologists can investigate knowledge in general, rather than specific knowledge episodes or particular domains of knowledge such as cooking or chemistry.[3] Epistemological realism creates the conceptual space for external-world skepticism (Williams 2004, 195). In normal contexts, one may wonder whether that cup contains Irish Breakfast or Oolong tea; in skeptical, epistemological contexts, one wonders how one knows such things as tea, sloths, computers, rocks, and so forth exist at all. Epistemological realism is the view that there is a theoretical object of investigation—the overarching category of all knowledge in general—that has enough theoretical integrity to be worthy of theoretical inquiry.

It would be highly anachronistic to assimilate Jayarāśi to the whole of Williams's theory. However, epistemological realism is a helpful way to think about what Jayarāśi is denying. He wants to demonstrate that we have no reason to consider structures of knowledge called means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*). This is not a metaphysical thesis that these objects do not exist, but an epistemological argument that—at least given the terms of the epistemologists themselves—it is difficult to see how we could know about such things whether they exist or not.[4] It is of course a peculiar sort of epistemological argument. Rather than putting forward a thesis in epistemology to the effect that we are unable to know whether *pramāṇas* exist (as a sort of epistemological skepticism), it seeks to demonstrate that the epistemology of the classical Indian *pramāṇavādins* is impossible in its own terms.

5.2 Buddhist Epistemological Realism: Dignāga and Dharmakīrti

To make the case that Jayarāśi's arguments should be seen as denials of epistemological realism, or something like it, I will demonstrate that some of his targets, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, accept something

like epistemological realism. I will then summarize some of Jayarāśi's arguments against Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as examples of his denial of epistemological realism. I should reiterate that epistemological realism ought to be distinguished sharply from metaphysical realism. Therefore, even if Dignāga or Dharmakīrti were metaphysical idealists (which Dharmakīrti may have been), they can still be epistemological realists because they accept the existence of objects of epistemological inquiry.

In the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (hereafter, PS, and PSV for Dignāga's autocommentary), Dignāga claims that the two *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge) are *pratyakṣa* (perception) and *anumāna* (inference).[5] Why two? "*Pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are the two *pramāṇas*. There are these two alone, because the knowable object (*prameya*) has two characteristics" (PS 1.2a–c).[6] These two characteristics are *svalakṣana* (particular) and *sāmānyalakṣana* (universal). Dignāga explains, "*pratyakṣa* has the particular characteristic as its object and *anumāna* has the universal characteristic as its object" (PSV 1.2c).[7] This is an exclusive dichotomy; any *pramāṇa* must be either *pratyakṣa* or *anumāna*, but not both, and any *prameya* must be either *svalakṣana* or *sāmānyalakṣana*, but not both.[8] The key distinguishing feature between *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* is that "*pratyakṣa* is free from *kalpanā* (imagination, conceptual construction)" (PS 1.3a).[9]*Kalpanā* is "the joining together of something with names, universals, etc" (PS 1.3d).[10] Any *pramāṇa* that partakes of conceptual construction cannot be *pratyakṣa* and it cannot be memory, re-cognition, and so forth; hence, it must be inference. Dignāga asserts, "Thus, it is established that perception is free from conceptual construction" (PSV 1.12d).[11]

Dharmakīrti is Dignāga's most famous commentator; while he generally agrees with Dignāga, there are at least three important differences. First, Dharmakīrti adds "non-erroneous" (*abhrāntam*) to the definition of perception (*pratyakṣa*). Dignāga is a type of phenomenalist: we can never be wrong *that* we are having a sensation because the only source of error is conceptualization, which means that *pratyakṣa* is non-erroneous.[12] Dharmakīrti added "non-erroneous" to account for perceptual errors based entirely on defects in sense organs such as jaundice or *taimira* eye disease, although there is scholarly controversy on this issue.[13] For Dignāga, every perceptual cognition is non-erroneous, but for Dharmakīrti, some perceptual cognitions are erroneous even though they are free from conceptualization.[14] Second, Dharmakīrti introduces the concept of *arthakriyā*, which has been translated as "fulfillment of human purpose" or "telic function" (Katsura 1984, 218–219; Dunne 2004, 273). The idea is that *pramāṇas* can successfully lead one to fulfill a purpose (e.g., if one accurately perceives water, then one can fulfill

the purpose of drinking water). Third, for Dharmakīrti inference is guaranteed by the "natural relation" (*svabhāvapratibandha*) between the evidence/reason (*hetu*) and that which is to be proved (*sādhya*).[15] This theory is far more complex than I can discuss here. The basic idea is that relations between universals can be reduced to relations between particulars; these particulars possess natures (*svabhāva*) that are related to one another causally or as an identity[16] (Dunne 2004, 152). For Dharmakīrti, these two types of relations are what guarantee inferential cognitions despite the non-existence of universals.

The epistemological theories of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti constitute a variety of epistemological realism, because *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* as well as *svalakṣana* and *sāmānyalakṣana* are presented as real objects of epistemological inquiry. The fact that *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are fundamentally different classes of cognitions is not conceptually constructed, even if our words and concepts about this distinction are. Dignāga's dualism maps on to a part of reality that is the object of epistemological inquiry. One might object that "natural kinds" do not exist for Buddhists like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, since for them universals do not exist. However, Dharmakīrti has the idea of a "natural relation" (*svabhāvapratibandha*) as discussed above. Conceptual categories of perception and inference map on to real particular cognitions with real natures and causal relations. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are epistemological realists because *there are* such objects as perception, inference, and particulars for their epistemological theories to be about.

Next I will look at two arguments in chapter three of the TUS, which will demonstrate how Jayarāśi attacks the theories of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and how doing so serves his larger goal as a Cārvāka skeptic about philosophy.[17] The first argument contains the conclusion that the Buddhist epistemologists cannot explain the difference between perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). The second argument leads to the conclusion that, if Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were right, then we could not talk or think about there being two *pramāṇas*. My goal in the present chapter is not to evaluate these arguments, although I have evaluated the second argument elsewhere along with a similar argument from Candrakīrti (Mills 2015b). Here I mean to show how these arguments support my interpretation of Jayarāśi as a skeptic about philosophy, and I will leave it to the reader to decide how serious a challenge Jayarāśi presents to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.

5.3 The Non-Establishment of Difference Argument

The Non-Establishment of Difference Argument seeks to show that the Buddhists cannot maintain their distinction between perception and inference.[18] This argument is a representative example of Jayarāśi's typically complex *prasaṅga* form. He begins with Dignāga's assertion that there are two *pramāṇas*. Jayarāśi asks, "This duality, is it (1) due to a difference of individuals, (2) a difference of form or (3) a difference of objects?" (TUS 3.3).[19]For expository purposes, I am using a numbering system for the options (*vikalpas*).

1. Concerning the first *vikalpa*, Jayarāśi notes that there are innumerable individual cognitions. Hence, there would be innumerable *pramāṇas* rather than two. Also, cognitions cannot be differentiated by their character as cognitions, because they all share this character. If they no longer shared this character, they would no longer be cognitions.[20]
2. The second *vikalpa* represents Dharmakīrti's opinion that the difference is due to a difference of form (*ākāra*). Jayarāśi says, "Perception and inference have no other form except the form of a cognition."[21] If they were to possess some other form, they would no longer be cognitions. A cognition cannot have multiple forms, "because it has an undivided nature."[22] The idea here seems to be that there is no basis for asserting that one thing can possess more than one form, if one denies—as the Buddhists do—the existence of universals and accepts only the existence of self-characterized particulars. It may help to think of *ākāra* more as "appearance" rather than more generically as "form." This makes more sense of the idea that a bare particular can have only one appearance, especially from a phenomenalist point of view in which the particular simply is an appearance.
3. After he dispenses with *vikalpas* one (difference in individuals) and two (difference in form), Jayarāśi entertains the third. This part of the argument becomes quite complex and multilayered—Jayarāśi weaves *prasaṅgas* within *prasaṅgas* within *prasaṅgas*. This third option is the notion that the difference in *pramāṇas* is due to the difference in their objects.
    3.1. Jayarāśi begins with inference: "Is it (i.e., the inferential cognition) (1) that which has a particular such as fire, etc., as its object, (2) that which has an existing universal as its object, (3) that which has an unreal universal for its object, (4) that which is without an object, or (5) that which has the rest of itself as its object?" (TUS 3.331).[23]
        3.1.1. With regard to whether an inferential cognition has a particular as its object, Jayarāśi points out that if this were the case, then it is the same as *pratyakṣa*, because both

kinds of cognitions have the particular as their object. Jayarāśi considers Dharmakīrti's idea that the general property (that this is a fire) is grasped by *anumāna*, while the specific property (*this* fire) is grasped by *pratyakṣa*; even then, Jayarāśi answers, this "general property" is a particular general property and there is still no difference.

3.1.2. Perhaps inference has an existing universal as its object. This would make the two kinds of *pramāṇas* identical, since the universal would become a particular. Franco explains how this could work in Buddhist terms: "everything existing is a particular; the universal exists; therefore the universal is a particular" (Franco 1994, 426 n. 176). In addition, for Buddhists, if universals existed, they would be eternal and thus could not possess the causal efficacy needed to cause cognitions or give their forms to cognitions. Lastly, if *anumāna* were to apprehend existing universals, then the Buddhists could not maintain that inference is ultimately erroneous (*bhrānta*), because it would be apprehending existing objects.

3.1.2. Perhaps inference has a nonexistent universal as its object. Jayarāśi says, "then this (i.e., inferential cognition) is not erroneous, because a non-existent object exists as its own form" (TUS 3.331).[24] It is likely that he means that the object (*viṣaya*) as intentional content exists in virtue of being a mental form. So it cannot be said to be entirely nonexistent.[25] Jayarāśi then repeats the point that a nonexistent thing lacks causal efficacy, so it can neither cause cognitions nor provide its form to them. If it could do so, it would be real, like a particular, and again there would be no basis for asserting a difference between a particular and a universal.[26]

3.1.4. Maybe inference is without an object. Jayarāśi cleverly notices that if inference has no object, then there is no object that could be different than the object of perception. Neither could it be erroneous as being erroneous is a relation between an object and a cognition.

3.1.5. Perhaps inference has a portion of itself (*svāṃśa*) as an object, that is, one part of the inferential cognition would constitute the object of another part of the same cognition. Perhaps this means that an inference would function by reasoning about an introspected past experience, which would take place within a single cognition, although Jayarāśi does not say exactly what he means.[27] He says that if an inferential cognition were to have a portion of

itself as its object, then it has a particular (i.e., that particular cognition) as an object, not a universal. Nor would inference be erroneous, "because a portion of itself does not delude [the cognition]" (TUS 3.331).[28] Dignāga claims that an inferential cognition is erroneous because the whole cognition is conceptualized, not because one part of it deludes the rest.

3.2. Having dismissed the idea that *anumāna* is different than *pratyakṣa*, Jayarāśi turns to show that his opponents also cannot establish that *pratyakṣa* is different than *anumāna*. There are three more options: "Is it (i.e., *pratyakṣa*) (1) that which has a particular such as form, etc. as its object, (2) that which has itself as its object, or (3) that which has both [a particular and itself] as its object?" (TUS 3.332).[29]

3.2.1. The first option will not work as the Buddhists claim that every cognition cognizes itself and "because when that [cognition] is not cognized, there is no cognition of that [object]" (TUS 3.332).[30] If there were *only* cognition of the object in the absence of self-cognition, then one would not even know the object itself. This is one of Dharmakīrti's arguments for the self-luminosity (*svaprakāśa*) of cognition: "seeing an object is not established for a person who has not apprehended [one's own] perception" (PVin 1.54).[31] If the evidence for an object's existence is a cognition of it, and the evidence for a cognition is an apprehension of itself, then there must be an apprehension of the cognition in order for there to be evidence of the object itself. Hence, perception cannot—at least according to the Buddhists' theory—have merely a particular as its object.

3.2.2. Maybe the cognition could be its own object. To be an object of cognition is both to cause that cognition and give a form to that cognition. However, the Buddhists maintain that nothing can cause itself or give its own form to itself. Hence, a cognition cannot have only itself as an object. Furthermore, if cognition were to have only itself as its object, there would be no way to assert a difference between *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*—both types of cognitions would have themselves as objects.

3.2.3. Perhaps it could be that both the cognition and the particular are the object of a perceptual cognition.

This is also incorrect, because of the fact that one apprehension is established by means of the exclusion of a second form. And if grasping a cognition is just grasping a form, then either the form

would have the form of the cognition, the cognition would have the form of the form, or grasping the form would not *establish* the form. (TUS 3.332)[32]

First, to grasp one form, the cognition must exclude other forms and cannot be grasping any other forms. Thus, a cognition cannot grasp both the object and itself at the same time, because this would require grasping two forms simultaneously. Second, even if one cognition could somehow simultaneously apprehend itself and a visible form, then either one must have the form of the other (and the cognition would still apprehend only a single form) or the cognition cannot establish the object, for reasons discussed in the first *vikalpa* (3.2.1). Lastly, Jayarāśi says, "And furthermore we do not see one thing with a duality of forms" (TUS 3.332).[33] If these alleged dual-formed cognitions are never observed, this ought to militate against accepting them as established.

Therefore, by a systematic process of elimination, Jayarāśi aims to demonstrate that there is no possible avenue for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to establish any distinction between the two means of knowledge: perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*).[34] As their entire theory rests on this fundamental distinction, Jayarāśi's argument can be seen as a rejection of the Buddhists' epistemology as a whole.

5.4 The Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument

At the end of chapter three of the TUS, Jayarāśi presents an argument I call "The Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument." Franco claims that this is "one of the most brilliant arguments in the TUS" (Franco 1994, 430). I agree, and I would go so far as to say that it is one of my personal favorite philosophical arguments in the history of any philosophical tradition. Jayarāśi first notes that *pratyakṣa* apprehends itself and *anumāna* apprehends itself, but neither can apprehend the other as this would violate Dignāga's strict dichotomy of *pramāṇas*. Jayarāśi concludes, "Thus, talking or thinking about the number [of *pramāṇas*] being two is impossible" (TUS 3.3a).[35] Franco spells out the presupposition at work here: "In order to determine the number of means of valid cognition, one has to have them all as the object of one and the same cognition." Since this is impossible, "whatever the number of means of valid cognition may be, there is no way of knowing it" (Franco 1994, 430). In effect Jayarāśi rules out the possibility of even *considering* the Buddhist thesis that there are two

dichotomous *pramāṇas* on the basis of that theory itself. He ends the chapter on the Buddhist definitions of *pramāṇa* with the following: "And when this (i.e., there being two *pramāṇas*) is not possible, saying 'There are only two *pramāṇas*' is the gesticulation of a fool" (TUS 3.3a).[36]

One might object that this argument is mistaken: why cannot both *pramāṇas* be the object of an inferential cognition? Jayarāśi considers such an objection from an imagined Buddhist opponent:

> But then someone might object that the ascertainment of two [*pramāṇas*] is due to conceptualization. This is not correct. Even that conceptualization does not grasp two [*pramāṇas*], because it concludes in the cognition of itself. Or if it did grasp [two *pramāṇas*], then the [Buddhist] position would be abandoned. (TUS 3.3a.)[37]

Jayarāśi is merely pointing out that, according to the Buddhists, a conceptual cognition by definition cannot apprehend a perceptual cognition. If it could, the Buddhists would have to abandon their position that perception is free from conceptualization, because this alleged cognition capable of ascertaining both perception and inference would be conceptual and hence not perceptual. Therefore, it could not apprehend perception. It may also be that Jayarāśi is alluding to the Buddhist position of momentariness: since the conceptual cognition terminates in a single moment, it cannot last into a second moment in which it could apprehend perception as well.

Perhaps there could be further Buddhist rejoinders to this argument. It could be that inferential cognitions could somehow be about perceptual cognitions while maintaining the nonconceptual status of the perceptual cognition itself. Maybe an appeal to exclusion (*apoha*) could be used to demonstrate that inferential cognitions can have some causal relation to perceptual cognitions of ultimately real particulars. In any case, it is not my purpose here to evaluate Jayarāśi's arguments (although I do consider Jayarāśian responses in Mills 2015b). My purpose in this chapter has been to give a sense of the shape of some of Jayarāśi's arguments in order to show how my interpretation of Jayarāśi as a skeptic about philosophy makes the best sense of the text.

5.5 The Delightful Destruction of Epistemology and Jayarāśi's Skepticism About Philosophy

I would like to reiterate once again that this chapter has focused on a small part of the TUS. Readers should not get the idea that Jayarāśi has a particular theoretical quibble with Buddhist epistemologists like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, nor is he critiquing their views in order to put forward an epistemological view of his own. As I mentioned in the previous chapter (section 4.2), Jayarāśi presents *prasaṅga* arguments against the epistemological theories of every predominant school of his day—Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Grammarians, and so forth. His policy of philosophical destruction does not discriminate based on creed.

I have argued in section 4.5 that Jayarāśi's arguments should be understood to be entirely in accord with his membership in the Cārvāka school, or at least his place within a certain skeptical branch of Cārvāka. By undermining and eschewing the sorts of epistemological theorizing that in his day were primarily used to support various religious worldviews and practices (Buddhist, Jain, Brahmanical, etc.), Jayarāśi opens up the possibility of a form of life free from the confines of philosophical and religious dogma and praxis. Once his purgative philosophical practice has done its work, he explains, "all everyday practices are made delightful, because they are not deliberated" (TUS 14.5). This is not an anti-intellectual point (Jayarāśi was obviously an intellectual himself), but it does represent —in a manner similar to Sextus Empiricus—a freedom from the anxieties of philosophical theory building that allows a fuller enjoyment of everyday life. On this point Jayarāśi is, while fully immersed in the classical Indian tradition in his targets and philosophical tools, perhaps the closest to Pyrrhonian skepticism of the three pillars in his attitude toward the enjoyment of the everyday.

In chapter 4 I also claimed that Jayarāśi's relationship with the larger tradition of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy should be understood in terms of his development of the materialist strains of early Indian philosophy (in his rejection of a religious way of life) as well as his development of Sañjayan skepticism (in his refusal to accept any of the philosophical theses at hand). As should now be clear, especially from the labyrinthine Non-Establishment of Difference Argument, Jayarāśi utilized the *prasaṅga* form to a complex degree.

Of course this form of argument was also one of Nāgārjuna's primary tools, but as I suggested in chapter 1, it has its seeds as far back in the Indian tradition as the Hymn of Creation in Ṛg *Veda* 10.129. I read the argument there to be that the theory of creation under examination cannot be known in its own terms—if the gods themselves are created and we cannot be sure if there is an overseer or if this overseer knows anything, then this theory is unknowable due to

the suppositions of the theory itself. I referred to this and other proto-skeptical elements of the Ṛg *Veda* as the shadow of philosophical inquiry. As Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi reveal, the Indian philosophical tradition cast this shadow for many centuries, a shadow that extends at least until Śrī Harṣa, as we will see in the next two chapters.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to apply the general interpretive framework developed in chapter four to two of Jayarāśi's specific arguments against the Buddhist epistemological theories of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti: The Non-Establishment of Difference Argument and The Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument. Doing so provides further evidence of Jayarāśi's membership within a branch of skeptical Cārvākas as well as his important place as one of the three pillars of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy, a tradition that itself can be traced back to the earliest parts of the Indian philosophical tradition and through the classical era. Whereas Nāgārjuna exemplified this tradition near the beginning of the classical period and Śrī Harṣa toward the end, Jayarāśi represents an important instantiation of skepticism about philosophy near the middle at the height of the post-Dignāga epistemological turn in classical India. This gives more evidence for my contention that skepticism about philosophy was a persistent minority within the Indian tradition as well as a type of skepticism distinct from modern and contemporary senses of epistemological skepticism.

Having looked in depth at two of the three pillars, in the next two chapters I will turn to the third: Śrī Harṣa, a philosopher who brought skepticism about philosophy to bear against the sophisticated developments in realist epistemology and metaphysics near the end of the classical tradition. As we will see, he did so as part of his own nuanced development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

NOTES

1. *sallakṣaṇanibandhana*ṃ *mānavyavasthānam. mānanibandhanā ca meyasthiti*ḥ. *tadabhāve tayo*ḥ *sadvyavahāraviṣayatva*ṃ *katha*ṃ. TUS 0.3. See chapter 4, the section 4.2.

2. Williams puts forward a Wittgensteinian version of contextualism in which there is no "knowledge as such" but rather different kinds of inquiry, each governed by its own particular theoretical presuppositions called "methodological necessities." In denying the intuitive nature of skepticism Williams claims, "The Humean condition and the human condition are not the same" (Williams 1996,

359).

3. Descartes's First Meditation contains an example of this generalizing feature: "For the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task. Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested." (Descartes 1985, 12).

4. Williams is ambiguous on whether his point is primarily a metaphysical or epistemological, but I maintain that it is epistemological for Jayarāśi.

5. While *pratyakṣa* is often translated as "perception," Dignāga means something closer to "sensation," since "perception" has the connotation of "seeing something *as* something," whereas "sensation" retains Dignāga's sense of nonconceptual awareness (Hayes 1988, 134). However, since *pratyakṣa* means something closer to "perception" for most other classical Indian philosophers, I will translate it as "perception" to avoid confusion. I translate *anumāna* as "inference" with the following caveat: "Dignāga's inference thus embraces, besides our inference, all that we would call judgment, intellection, ideation, thought, reason, etc., every cognitive process, except pure passive sensation" (Stcherbatsky in Shastri 1997, 62).

6. *pratyakṣam anumānaṃ ca pramāṇe te dve eva. yasmāt lakṣanadvayam | prameyaṃ*. PS 1.2a-c.

7. *svalakṣanaviṣayam ca pratyakṣaṃ sāmānyalakṣanaviṣayam anumānam.* PSV 1.2c.

8. Why should there be two *pramāṇas* just because there are two *prameyas*? The answer is partly grammatical. *Pramāṇa* is "the instrument of veridical cognition" and *prameya* is a gerundive that means "that which is to be veridically cognized." If there are two things to be veridically cognized and these two things are radically dichotomous, it follows that the instruments of cognizing these two must also be dichotomous.

9. *pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍhaṃ*. PS 1.3a.

10. *nāmajātyādiyojanā.* PS 1.3d.

11. *tathā pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍham iti sthitam.* PSV 1.12d.

12. Dignāga seems to hold the view that perceptual cognitions are sense data that are incorrigible or undoubtable in the sense discussed by J. L. Austin (Austin 1962, Ch. 10).

13. The controversy begins with Dignāga's discussion of error at PS 1.7cd-1.8ab, in which he uses the word "*sataimira*" ("with the *taimira* eye disease"), and his argument against the Nyāya theory of perception, which allows for errors based solely on defects in a sense organ (PS 1.3.1; Hattori 1968, 122–123 n. 3.7; Taber 2005, 173 n. 96; Franco 1986, 79–80). Jinendrabuddhi and Dharmakīrti take "*sataimira*" as a separate kind of error, which requires the addition of "non-erroneous" to true perception (Hattori 1968, 95–96 n. 1.53; Taber 2005, 173 n. 96). Hattori and Franco claim that Dignāga did not accept "*sataimira*" as a separate kind of error. Hattori translates *sataimira* as "accompanied by obscurity," which modifies "*pratyakṣābhāsa*" ("false appearance of perception") (Hattori 1968, 28). Franco's position is that Dignāga takes even *sataimira* cognitions to result from the mind, so these cognitions constitute a subset of error based on conceptual construction (Franco 1986, 93).

14. Franco thinks Dignāga may have been pushed into his position on the non-erroneousness of all perception as a response to Nāgārjuna's arguments in MMK

and VV (Franco 1986, 86–92).

15. For a discussion of the translation of *svabhāvapratibandha*, see Dunne 2004, 151 n. 17.

16. That is, "fire" and "smoke" as universals are reduced to a causal relation between causal-continuums of fire-particulars and smoke-particulars. "Mangoes" and "fruits" can be reduced to an identity relation, since any particular mango is necessarily a particular fruit.

17. The focus of this chapter is the Buddhist definition of *pramāṇa*. In the first half, Jayarāśi argues against the definition of *pramāṇa* as the apprehension of a previously unapprehended object (*anadhigatāgantṛ*) and as that which is non-contradictory (*avisaṃvādin*). The second half of the chapter contains the arguments I consider here. Note that both chapter headings and paragraphs were created by Sanghavi and Parikh in their edition of the text (Sanghavi and Parikh 1987, ii).

18. Note that in the remainder of this chapter "the Buddhists" should be understood to indicate Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as well as Buddhist philosophers in the tradition they inspired.

19. *tad dvitvaṃ kiṃ vyaktibhedenākārabhedena viṣayabedena vā?* TUS 3.3.

20. All of my characterizations of Jayarāśi's "Non-establishment of Difference Argument" come from TUS 3.3–3.332 unless otherwise noted.

21. *jñānākāravyatirekeṇa pratyakṣānumānayor nākārāntaram asti.* TUS 3.32.

22. *tasyābhinnātmakatvāt.* TUS 3.32.

23. *kim agnyādisvalakṣaṇaviṣayaṃ vidyamānasāmānyaviṣayam apāramārthikasāmānyaviṣayaṃ vā nirviṣayaṃ vā svāṃśaviṣayaṃ vā?* TUS 3.331.

24. *na tarhi tasya bhrāntatāsataḥ svena rūpeṇa vidhyamānatvāt.* TUS 3.331.

25. Franco suggests that Jayarāśi may be referring to an earlier part of the TUS (1.1ba) "where he proves that there is no difference between the objects of valid and false cognitions" (Franco 1994, 428 n. 180). In that section, Jayarāśi argues that a cognition cannot be sublated by either an object or a cognition, and that false cognitions can have causal efficacy (*arthakriyā*) (TUS 1.1ba-1.1baa-b). See also Solomon (2010, 33–37).

26. On this point, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti might answer that, while universals are unreal, the process of exclusion (*apoha*) by which "universals" are conceptually constructed is ultimately caused by particulars.

27. John Taber (personal communication) suggested that this may be an idealist option according to which inference operates on a form that arises within cognition.

28. *svāṃśasyāvañcanāt.* TUS 3.331. While Jayarāśi probably intends to resolve the *sandhi* as "*avañcana*" (non-delusion), it is possible he intends "*āvañcana*," which would mean that the parts of a cognition are always connected or are "flowing near" (*āvañcana*) each other (Monier-Williams 1994, 154). In this case, the parts of a cognition cannot be separated in order for one part to lead the other astray.

29. *rūpādisvalakṣaṇaviṣayam ātmaviṣayam ubhayaviṣayaṃ vā?* TUS 3.332.

30. *tadanavagatāv etadgatyabhāvāt.* TUS 3.332.

31. *apratyakṣopalambhasya nārthaḍṛṣṭiḥ prasidhyati.* PVin 1.54. For further discussion of Dharmakīrti's argument, see Franco (1994, 429–430 n.183).

32. *tad apy ayuktam, ekopalambhasya dvitīyākāraparihāreṇa vyavasthitatvāt. yadi ca rūpagṛhītir eva jñānagṛhītis, tadā rūpasya jñānarūpatā, jñānasya vā rūparūpatā, rūpagṛhīter vā rūpāvyavasthāpakatvam.* TUS 3.332.

33. *na caikasyākāradvayaṃ paśyāmaḥ*. TUS 3.332.

34. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti could conceivably reply to Jayarāśi's arguments. For instance, Dignāga might ask why it is that one cognition cannot have two forms. Jayarāśi asserts this in "The Non-establishment of Difference Argument" (*vikalpas* 2 and 3.2.3). Perhaps these are options for establishing the difference between perception and inference, since a perception would have a particular and itself as its object while an inference would have a universal and itself as its object. Jayarāśi may be right that Dignāga is committed to the ontological reality of only one form per object, since a *pramāṇa* and its result *(pramāṇa-phala*) are ultimately identical. Even so, Dignāga has established that a single cognition has two forms (*dvi-rūpa*): the form of itself and the form of the object. Dignāga means that a single cognition, being a unique particular, ultimately has just one form, but that that form itself has two aspects and therefore the difference between perception and inference is established by the different aspects of their forms. But then, Jayarāśi might ask, if one takes *rūpa* or *ākāra* in the sense of appearance, Dignāgan phenomenalism makes it difficult to see how one particular can *have* more than one appearance if that particular simply *is* an appearance.

35. *evaṃ dvitvasaṅkhyāvyavahārānupapattiḥ*. TUS 3.3a. Candrakīrti presents a similar argument, which may suggest that Jayarāśi was familiar with Candrakīrti. "Furthermore, if it is said that there are two *pramāṇas* through adherence to two characteristics—particular and universal, then that characterized thing, of which there are two characterizing marks (i.e., particular and universal), does that exist, or on the other hand, does it not exist? If it exists, then there is another third *prameya* than those two, so how are there two *pramāṇas*? On the other hand, if that which is characterized does *not* exist, then the characterization is also without a basis, so how could there be two *pramāṇas*?" (PP, p. 20, lines 20–23). For my comparison and (favorable) evaluation of Jayarāśi's and Candrakīrti's arguments, see Mills (2015b).

36. *tadanupapattau ca dve eveti jaḍaceṣṭitam.* TUS 3.3a.

37. *atha vikalpena dvayāvadhāraṇam iti cet. tad ayuktam, asāv apy ātmasaṃvedanaparyavasitatvān na dvayaṃ gṛhṇāti. grahaṇe vābhyupetahānam.* TUS 3.3a.

Chapter 6

Śrī Harṣa's Advaita Skepticism

The Critique of Realism and the Possibility of Mysticism

> *One understands the extensive discourses of Cārvākas, Mādhyamikas, and so forth even though they do not accept that (i.e., that the means of knowledge exist).*
>
> —*Śrī Harṣa,*
> Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya, *p. 7*

Having discussed the pillars of skepticism about philosophy near the beginning—Nāgārjuna—and middle—Jayarāśi—of the classical Indian tradition, I turn to the third and final pillar, Śrī Harṣa (c. 1125–1180 CE[1]). As we shall see, Śrī Harṣa relies on many of the same skeptical methods of his predecessors—*prasaṅga*, infinite regress, and so forth. He is, however, affiliated with Advaita Vedānta, a Brahmanical school inspired above all by the *Upaniṣads*.

Vedānta means "the end or culmination of the Veda," which indicates the *Upaniṣads* as well as their central message (or at any rate what the various Vedānta schools take to be the central message of the *Upaniṣads*). Advaita means "non-dualism" (literally "non-two-ism" from the Sanskrit for two, *dvi*). Followers of Advaita Vedānta interpret the *Upaniṣads* to indicate the ultimate existence of only non-dual *brahman* and the ultimate non-existence of any dualism, plurality, or difference. Given this rather remarkable knowledge claim, Advaita may sound like an uneasy home for a skeptic, but recall the elements within the *Upaniṣads* that I referred to as *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism. In chapter 1, I characterized this type of skepticism as follows:

1. There is mystical knowledge of *ātman/brahman*, and
2. This mystical knowledge cannot be gained through the senses or

through philosophical means such as reasoning, analysis, linguistic conceptualization, and so forth.

Śrī Harṣa applies the type of skeptical methods developed by Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi to the second part of this characterization, especially with regard to the claims of the realist schools. In destroying the foundations of realism, he opens up the *possibility* of mystical, non-dual knowledge but does not strictly speaking argue in favor of its existence. This is a subtle and somewhat controversial point that I will articulate in this chapter and the next.

Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi refer to their own traditions, early Buddhism and Cārvāka respectively, but make little explicit reference to outside influence, although I hope to have shown that these influences were nonetheless present. Śrī Harṣa, on the other hand, is cognizant of his affinity, not just with his own Advaita tradition, but also with the broader skeptical tradition in India. He refers directly to skeptical Mādhyamikas and Cārvākas. As I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter (section 7.1), he denies that engaging in a philosophical debate requires that both participants in the debate accept the existence of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), "because one understands the extensive discourses of Cārvākas, Mādhyamikas, and so forth even though they do not accept that (i.e., that the *pramāṇas* exist)" (KhKh, p. 7).2 This is evidence that Śrī Harṣa thought of himself as similar in at least one respect with the types of skeptical Madhyamaka and Cārvāka philosophers I've discussed in previous chapters. My hope is to show that there are deeper similarities that make it possible to speak of an overarching tradition of skepticism about philosophy in classical India.

The thesis of this chapter is that Śrī Harṣa should, like Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi, be read as a skeptic about philosophy and as the third major pillar in the tradition of that type of skepticism in classical India. Since Śrī Harṣa comes toward the end of the classical period, I begin with a treatment of his philosophical context, especially with the rise of post-Śaṅkara Advaita Vedānta and the continuing refinement of realism in the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā schools. I then discuss some of the major contemporary interpretations of Śrī Harṣa from scholars such as Granoff, Phillips, and Ram-Prasad as a means by which to present my own interpretation.

After a general discussion of Śrī Harṣa's critiques of realism in epistemology and metaphysics (of which more specific, detailed treatment will be given in the next chapter), I explain that, like Ram-Prasad, I see the point of Śrī Harṣa's negative dialectic to be to eliminate realism and to merely present the possibility of mystical

experience of a non-dual *brahman*, but that unlike other contemporary scholars, I see this as a kind of skepticism about philosophy and part of the tradition that I have been exploring in this book. In particular, Śrī Harṣa presents a sophisticated development of the sort of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism discussed in chapter 1.

Before diving in, I would like to remind readers of my plea to aim for some flexibility in their understanding of skepticism, particularly in moving beyond an understanding of skepticism in the contemporary epistemological sense of an epistemological theory or truth-claim about the extent of human knowledge. In calling Śrī Harṣa a skeptic I mean to claim that he is one member of the category of skepticism about philosophy that I described more generally in the introduction (section 0.2). While Śrī Harṣa shares many family resemblances with Hellenistic skepticism and yet closer resemblances with his fellow Indian skeptics, he nonetheless presents a unique version of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy in his subtle and intellectually agile development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

6.1 The Rise of Advaita Vedānta and the Continuing Refinement of Realism

Much of philosophical interest occurred in India during the three centuries between Jayarāśi (c. 770–830 CE) and Śrī Harṣa (c. 1125–1180 CE). The two major developments most important for understanding Śrī Harṣa's context are the rise of the Vedānta schools, especially Advaita tradition of Śaṅkara, and the sophisticated refinement in realist philosophies, especially those of the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā traditions.

Advaita is merely one of several Vedānta schools, which include Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism), Bhedābheda (difference and non-difference), and Dvaita (dualism). There is a great deal of internal diversity among Vedānta schools and even within them. Some are theistic, others non-theistic. Some accept a dualism between *brahman* and the world, others accept a kind of qualified non-dualism. Nonetheless, all Vedānta schools take the *Upaniṣads* as their primary inspiration and Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedāntasūtra* (also known as *Brahmasūtra*) as their root text, although there is extensive debate about the proper interpretation of these texts.[3] Also, many Vedānta schools share some similarities with the realist, ritualist school of Vedic interpretation, Mīmāṃsā; for example, many Vedānta philosophers accept versions of the Mīmāṃsā thesis of intrinsic validity (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*) of cognitions.

The history of the various Vedānta traditions is vast and continued from ancient times through the medieval and modern eras and, largely due to the efforts of Neo-Vedāntins such as Ramakrishna (1836–1886), Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), up until the present day. As fascinating as the history of Vedānta is, most of it is beyond my purposes here and has been thoroughly explored elsewhere[4], so I will concentrate on the early Advaita tradition. I do want to stress, however, that Advaita is merely one of several Vedānta schools and should not be taken as representing all of Indian philosophy or even all of Vedānta.

While Advaitins (followers of Advaita) point to the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedāntasūtra* as the foundations of their school, the "founder" of the school—or at least the first recognizably Advaita philosopher whose texts are available—could be said to be Gauḍapāda (c. 500 CE).[5] Gauḍapāda is traditionally recognized as a teacher within the lineage of Śaṅkara, even according to some sources as the teacher of Śaṅkara's teacher.[6] In his extensive commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, often referred to as *Āgama Śāstra* (hereafter, ĀŚ), Gauḍapāda argues in favor of a non-dual idealism, although some scholars have argued that his point is more phenomenological.[7] On the traditional idealist reading, Gauḍapāda supports the metaphysical thesis that everything is ultimately non-dual *brahman*—timeless, uncreated, non-spatial, objectless consciousness without difference. On phenomenological readings, Gauḍapāda's point is more epistemological: whether anything exists outside of consciousness or not, consciousness is what is immediately available to us—our *ideas* about things are the product of imagination (*kalpanā*), but the things themselves are not necessarily the products of imagination.

Because he uses Buddhist-sounding vocabulary and even similar arguments, especially dream arguments (e.g., ĀŚ 2.1–12), some scholars have suggested a deep similarity between Gauḍapāda and Buddhist philosophy, particularly Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, some going so far as to say that Gauḍapāda (or at least the author of some parts of the text) may have been a Buddhist rather than a Brahmanical philosopher.[8] I can't resolve these interpretive disputes here, although I think it is also entirely possible that Gauḍapāda was using Buddhist terms and similar arguments for different purposes within an idealist Vedānta context. Nonetheless, it is perhaps appropriate that Gauḍapāda has similarities with Buddhist ideas considering that later opponents often denigrated Advaita as a sort of "crypto-Buddhism" on account of these similarities.[9]

Śaṅkara (c. 700–750 CE[10]) stands as perhaps the single greatest influence not only within the Advaita tradition, but within the entire

Indian philosophical tradition that came after him up until the present day. In addition to his magnum opus, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (a commentary on Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahmasūtra/Vedāntasūtra*), he is often considered to be the author of several independent works, such as the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, *Bālabodhinī*, and *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, as well as numerous commentaries on *Upaniṣads* including the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Kaṭha*, *Kena*, and *Māṇḍukya*, the last of which includes a commentary on Gauḍapāda's commentary.[11]

Śaṅkara's most famous philosophical theses can be summed up in the slogan, "*brahman* is the truth, the world is false, the individual self is not different from *brahman*" (*brahma satya*ṃ *jagat mithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāpara*ḥ).[12]*Brahman* is the sole ultimate reality; it is non-dual, unoriginated, unending, without difference, pure objectless consciousness. *Brahman* is, according to another popular slogan, "being-consciousness-bliss" (*sat cit ānanda*).[13] The world of appearance, consisting as it does of plurality and difference, is therefore false (*mithyā*). To account for the falsity of the world of appearance, Śaṅkara develops a sophisticated theory of illusion (*māya*) along with the corresponding theory of superimposition (*adhyāsa*), according to which all difference is a superimposition on non-dual *brahman* just as mistaking a rope as a snake in the darkness is a superimposition of the idea of a snake on an existing rope.[14] Śaṅkara's idealism differs from that of many Yogācāra Buddhists, however, in that he takes the phenomenal world (i.e., the world of appearance, sometimes referred to as *prapañca*[15]) to be real in a sense, or at least as real as the individual consciousness of the experiencer of the world—both subject and object are, of course, eventually overturned by experience of non-dual *brahman*.[16] This leads to the last part of the slogan. There is ultimately no difference between the individual self (*jīva* or *ātman*) and *brahman*, which is a particular understanding of passages in the *Upaniṣads* such as the famous "you are that" (*tat tvam asi*) in chapter six of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.[17] This is one of the reasons for calling this school Advaita. There is a non-dualism between *jīva* or *ātman* understood in the individual sense[18] and *brahman* understood in the vast cosmological sense—the innermost essence of self and the most expansive essence of reality itself are fundamentally identical.

This cursory summary does not begin to do justice to the breadth and depth of Śaṅkara's philosophical accomplishments and subsequent influence. Nor have I touched on Śaṅkara's complex and far-ranging arguments in favor of his position. Before moving on, however, I should briefly explain one of his most innovative arguments whose influence can be felt in the work of subsequent Advaitins including Śrī Harṣa. This is an argument that Stephen Phillips calls the Sublatability

Argument (Phillips 1995, 28).

Sublation (*bādhaka*) is the process by which one cognition overturns and replaces another. Some everyday examples include thinking one sees a snake and then later realizing it is a rope or thinking one sees a pond and then realizing it is a mirage. Sublation always involves moving from one cognition to another in which the second cognition includes the idea that the first cognition is erroneous; the second cognition may possibly also include a value judgment about the worth of the first cognition.[19]

With this in mind, Śaṅkara begins with perceptual illusions. What these show, according to Śaṅkara, is that perceptual cognitions are always—at least in principle—sublatable. First personal knowledge of the self, on the other hand, is not sublatable, precisely because nobody says, "I am not."[20] The implied premise of the argument is that sublatability is a criterion for what is real. Therefore, it is possible—at least in principle—that the world of differences revealed by perception could be sublated by some future cognition, whereas the existence of consciousness is not sublatable even in principle, and therefore must be real.

While this conclusion is still far from full endorsement of the Advaita thesis of non-dual *brahman*, Phillips suggests that there is a further step: "according to Śaṅkara, perceptual illusion shows the possibility of world sublation, and the Upaniṣads, not the actual mystical experience, teach the fact of illusion. The mystical experience does not teach; it liberates" (Phillips 1995, 29). Whether Phillips is right about the specific details of this argument or not[21], sublatability (*bādhaka*) plays a central role for Śaṅkara, and as we shall see, it is also important for Śrī Harṣa.

After Śaṅkara, the Advaita tradition continued to develop in the work of philosophers such as Sureśvara, Padmapāda, Maṇḍana Miśra, and Vācaspati Miśra.[22] Among these philosophers, one of the most important developments was the theory of indeterminacy (*anirvacanīya*). This theory was first elaborated by Maṇḍana Miśra and developed in various ways by others.[23] The basic problem is this: if *brahman* is non-dual pure consciousness, from where do error (*mithyā*), illusion (*māya*), and ignorance (*avidyā*) come? What could the possible *locus* of these qualities be? *Who* or *what* is ignorant, and how is this ignorance removed? What are we in ignorance *about*?

According to Maṇḍana, ignorance cannot be real, because it involves difference and only *brahman* is real; if it were *brahman* it would be ultimately real rather than error or ignorance. But neither can ignorance be ultimately unreal, because then there would be nothing to remove, even at the level of appearance. So ignorance is neither absolutely real, nor absolutely unreal.[24] Padmapāda adds that

the phenomenal world, particularly its relation to *brahman*, is also indeterminable.[25]

While Maṇḍana and Padmapāda focus on the status of ignorance and the phenomenal world, Vācaspati focuses on the status of the object of cognition, or what it is that we could be ignorant about. Vācaspati argues that the object of cognition is indeterminable in the sense that we can determine neither that it is false nor that it is real, a position that Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (2002) calls "non-realism." As we shall see, Śrī Harṣa takes indeterminacy into yet another direction, applying it deep within the realists' program.

I move next to Śrī Harṣa's main target: the realist Nyāya school. I have already discussed Nyāya in previous chapters (especially section 3.2), and I will have more to say about Nyāya throughout this and the next chapter, but I can give a general framework here. Much about Nyāya can be gleaned from the first verse of Gautama's *Nyāya Sūtra* (c. 200 CE).[26]

> Attainment of the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*) is based on knowledge of the truth (*tattvajñāna*) of the following: means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), object of knowledge (*prameya*), doubt, purpose, example, established position, limbs of an inference, speculative reasoning, ascertainment, friendly debate (*vāda*), debate for the purpose of victory (*jalpa*), debate without establishing a counter-position (*vitaṇḍā*), fallacies, quibbling, false rejoinders, and grounds for defeat. (NS 1.1.1)[27]

For Nyāya philosophical matters of epistemology, metaphysics, logic, and debate are essential, because it is through a correct understanding of philosophical principles that one attains the highest good. As is the case for Aristotelians and Stoics in the ancient Greek and Hellenistic context, in Nyāya the truth shall set you free.[28]

The particular truths one needs to know in Nyāya turn out to be quite complex, but I can give a few general characterizations. The stress on logic in Nyāya is perhaps most obvious from the facts that the name of the school literally means "logic" and that most of the sixteen categories listed in NS 1.1.1 are technical terms related to particular understandings of inference (*anumāna*) and debate within Nyāya.[29] Even those terms can be applied outside the domain of logic *per se*—specifically the means of knowledge and object of knowledge—are essential within logic. For instance, not all perception (one of the means of knowledge) is related to inference, but for Nyāya all inference is ultimately rooted in perception.

The other basic characterization of Nyāya is its die-hard realism in both epistemology and metaphysics. Drawing on the Vaiśeṣika school,

Nyāya metaphysics is based on the existence of categories (*padārthas*), which are objective natural kinds. Furthermore, Naiyāyikas (i.e., followers of Nyāya) go to tremendous lengths to argue, against Yogācāra Buddhists in particular, that the self (*ātman*) and universals are real and that the objects of veridical perception are real, mind-independent objects. Nyāya epistemology is likewise realist in the sense that we can and do have legitimate knowledge of mind-independent objects, and Naiyāyikas typically accept four means of knowledge: perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. In a profoundly anti-skeptical mode, Naiyāyikas argue that denials of the means of knowledge, like Nāgārjuna's, are fundamentally incoherent —everyone is a realist, or they would be if they thought clearly enough about it.[30] This basic framework was refined by Naiyāyikas such as Vātsyāyana (c. fifth century CE), Uddotakara (c. sixth or seventh century CE), Jayanta (c. ninth century CE), and Udayana (c. 975–1050 CE), the last of whom in particular receives a lot of criticism from Śrī Harṣa.[31] The classical and contemporary literature on Nyāya is vast, and I won't try to do justice to all of it here.[32] I will touch on further Nyāya ideas as I come to them in this and the next chapter.

Like Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā is a realist school that affirms the commonsense reality of the physical world as different from an existing self. However, whereas Nyāya's relationship to the Vedas is somewhat hazy (one almost gets the sense that the Naiyāyikas are almost paying lip service to the Vedas before getting on with some logic), the Mīmāṃsā school is above all a school of Vedic interpretation ("Mīmāṃsā" means "investigation" as in "investigation of the Vedas").[33] For Mīmāṃsā, the Vedas are authorless, eternal texts taken to be absolutely authoritative in matters of ritual and ethics, a position supported by extensive argumentation.[34]

While Advaita authors obviously disagree with Mīmāṃsā realism, the two schools are in broad agreement on at least two issues. First, both schools are keen to show that scriptures such as the Vedas and *Upaniṣads* are independent means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) that nonetheless do not necessarily contradict the other means of knowledge, such as perception and inference (although in Advaita scripture is sometimes said to contradict everyday experience at a higher level). Second, both schools accept the thesis of intrinsic validity (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*), which is the thesis that cognitions are to be taken to be true until shown to be false, an "innocent until proven guilty" epistemology so to speak. For Mīmāṃsā, intrinsic validity is an important part of their arguments in favor of the existence of the physical world as well as the authority of the Vedas. Advaita, on the other hand, uses intrinsic validity to show that, while cognitions of a

perceptual or inferential nature are true within the phenomenal domain, even these are eventually overturned by experience of non-dual *brahman*, as in Śaṅkara's Sublatability Argument.[35]

6.2 Interpreting Śrī Harṣa: Negative Dialectic, Positive Idealism, and Non-Realism

Having given some of Śrī Harṣa's historical context, I turn now to the philosopher himself, starting with three of the major lines of interpretation in contemporary scholarship: Phyllis Granoff's negative dialectic interpretation, Stephen Phillips's positive idealist interpretation, and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad's non-realist interpretation.[36]

Little is known about Śrī Harṣa's life aside from a few biographical comments in his texts and one Jain text: the *Prabandhakośa* of Rājaśekhara.[37] Śrī Harṣa lived near the end of the classical period of Indian philosophy, probably in the twelfth century CE. Two of Śrī Harṣa's texts are available: the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* and the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. The first is an epic poem that tells a story from the *Mahābhārata*, which will not be my concern here, although it is of course interesting that Śrī Harṣa was a poet as well as an incisive philosopher. The *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, which I loosely translate as *Buffet of Destruction*,[38] is a long and complex philosophical text that includes, among other things, extensive critiques of realism from an Advaita perspective.

Phyllis Granoff presents a type of interpretation according to which Śrī Harṣa is primarily engaged in a negative dialectic. While Granoff believes that Śrī Harṣa is philosophically committed to Advaita and has his own views about Advaita matters (1978, 53–54), she sees the purpose of the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (hereafter: KhKh) as primarily negative along the lines of a *vitaṇḍā* style of debate.[39] For instance, she says, "Śrī Harṣa does no more than to show that the opponents' own doctrines contradict themselves" (1978, 3) and that he "never independently proves anything at all" (1978, 54). Her evidence for these claims is Śrī Harṣa's refutation of definitions of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) in Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Buddhism, and Jainism as well as his critique of Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, and Jain realism and his equally strong critique of Buddhist and Vedānta notions of conventional reality (*saṃvṛttisattva*) (Granoff 1978, 3, 54–56). More recently, Maharaj (2014) has given a similar negative dialectical interpretation.

Stephen Phillips (1995) rejects this sort of negative interpretation. According to him, Śrī Harṣa has a "positive program. . . . Some of his refutations . . . may be read as indirect proofs and thus be themselves positive argumentation bolstering planks of the Advaita stance" (Phillips 1995, 77). He notes that Śrī Harṣa initially accepts scripture (*śruti*) as a means of knowledge, although it is eventually sublated by "supreme mystical awareness"; all of Śrī Harṣa's negative arguments should be seen as aimed at ultimately supporting the positive Advaita idealist conclusion that "Brahman is to be accepted" (Phillips 1995, 82–83). Ganeri (2016) likewise takes Śrī Harṣa to commit himself to philosophical claims, although Ganeri, following recent suggestions from Granoff (2016), is less invested in the notion that Śrī Harṣa is a typical Advaitin or even that he is an Advaitin at all.

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (2002) takes Śrī Harṣa to be developing a position from earlier Advaitins such as Śaṅkara and Vācaspati Miśra, a subtle position that Ram-Prasad calls non-realism. Non-realism, according to Ram-Prasad, is neither idealism, nor realism, nor even anti-realism. It is not idealist because, "The objects of cognition . . . must be assumed to occur in some way extrinsic to cognition, because to deny that . . . is to deny the features of experience" (Ram-Prasad 2002, 164). Non-realism is also, however, against realism.

> But from the fact of their being assumed to occur (in order to explain the features of experience), it cannot be asserted that these objects which make up the world can be *proven* to occur (i.e., established as occurring) independently of cognition of them. . . . Consequently, there is no way to establish—or even explain coherently—the essential nature of objects. (Ram-Prasad 2002, 164, bold in original)

Thus, non-realism is a sort of middle way between realism and idealism with equal criticisms of both. Ram-Prasad does not want to call it anti-realism, however, because he takes anti-realism to imply a revisionary metaphysics that requires a redescription of our basic cognitive lives, whereas non-realism has no revisionary pretentions (Ram-Prasad 2002, 10). Perhaps the best summary of the position is this: "It may be characterized as being realist from an idealist point of view, idealist from a realist point of view, and sceptical about both points of view" (Ram-Prasad 2002, 91). Something close to Ram-Prasad's view has also been taken up recently by Timalsina (2014).

Although Ram-Prasad mentions several times that non-realism is a kind of anti-skepticism (e.g., Ram-Prasad 2002, 164, 201–210), it should be noted that he is referring to epistemological skepticism about the external world. As we shall see, even if Ram-Prasad is

correct that Śrī Harṣa is against this kind of skepticism, he can still be a skeptic about philosophy at another level.[40]

I think there is less shade between these three interpretations than there may initially seem to be. Each interpretation agrees that Śrī Harṣa is an Advaitin who makes extensive use of negative arguments, most of which are directed at various forms of realism.[41] Phillips and Granoff may seem to be diametrically opposed, but they both say that Śrī Harṣa *states* Advaita positions; the disagreement is about whether he provides any positive arguments in favor of Advaita claims (Granoff 1978, 53–54; Phillips 1995, 7). Furthermore, Phillips and Ram-Prasad are largely in agreement about Śrī Harṣa's philosophical program as an intellectual preparation for a program of religious praxis or insight, although Phillips says much more about this as constituting a form of mysticism (Ram-Prasad 2002, 134; Phillips 1995, 76).

Just as I argued that the demarcation between skeptical and non-skeptical interpretations of Nāgārjuna is whether the interpreter thinks Nāgārjuna is ultimately endorsing a truth-claim[42], so I think the fundamental disagreement about Śrī Harṣa is whether he is endorsing a truth-claim about Advaita metaphysics. Phillips thinks Śrī Harṣa is unambiguously endorsing such claims (albeit as the positive conclusions of negative arguments), whereas Granoff and Ram-Prasad think Śrī Harṣa is more circumspect when it comes to what he is able or willing to say about the truth of Advaita metaphysical claims.

My take on all this is that Phillips is right that we should see Śrī Harṣa as an Advaitin, but wrong that doing so implies that we must see him *arguing* in favor of positive conclusions.[43] On this matter, I agree much more with Granoff and Ram-Prasad who stress the negative, *vitaṇḍā* style of the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (KhKh). Phillips has mischaracterized the conclusions of Śrī Harṣa's arguments as positive counterstatements rather than mere rejections of the opponents' claims; in other words, he has mistaken non-implicative *prasajya* negations for implicative *paryudāsa* negations, a mistake that is easier to avoid when we see Śrī Harṣa as part of a tradition of skepticism about philosophy in classical India.[44]

Just as I argued with regard to Jayarāśi in chapter 4 (section 4.1), there are reasonable criteria for including a philosopher in a school besides that philosopher's explicit positive endorsement of the typical doctrines of that school. Just as Jayarāśi can be a Cārvāka despite his refusal to endorse typical Cārvāka materialist metaphysics, so can Śrī Harṣa be an Advaitin despite his refusal to argue directly in favor of typical Advaita positions. Whereas Jayarāśi can be called a Cārvāka in light of the way in which his arguments clear the ground for a worldly

life free from the fetters of philosophy, Śrī Harṣa can be called an Advaitin in light of the way in which his arguments clear the ground of the dogmatic barriers to non-dual experience.

That he never explicitly argues in favor of Advaita positions is, as I will argue later, a thoroughly reasonable path for a person convinced by Advaita, one that can be seen as a development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism and one that finds surprising inspiration in earlier Advaitins like Śaṅkara and Vācaspati. As Nāgārjuna's thesis of emptiness is meant to undermine philosophical engagement, taking non-dualism seriously ought to drain one of the impulse to engage in constructive (dualistic) philosophy.

My own interpretation of Śrī Harṣa has much in common with those of Granoff and Ram-Prasad, but there are some differences. I think Granoff (1978) says too little about Śrī Harṣa's ultimate Advaita aims, although she rectifies this later (Granoff 2016). Phillips, on the other hand, says a great deal more about Śrī Harṣa's mystical intentions than I think is warranted by the text. Here Ram-Prasad provides something of a subtle middle path. However, I think Ram-Prasad's non-realism underplays the extent to which Śrī Harṣa is skeptical. Although other scholars have called Śrī Harṣa a skeptic[45], the target and aims of his skepticism have seldom been made clear. He is skeptical about philosophy in a way that makes sense as a development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism; furthermore, in the hands of Śrī Harṣa, the tradition of skepticism about philosophy developed by Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi is directed toward Advaita ends.

6.3 The Critique of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā Realism

One striking feature of skepticism about philosophy is its inherently dialectical nature. There can be no skepticism about philosophy without some preexisting philosophical activity to be skeptical about. Unlike epistemological skepticism, which can and often does start from introspection about one's own cognitive abilities, skeptics about philosophy typically spend their time in destructive dialogue with whatever are the most popular (or most dogmatically troublesome) philosophical views in their respective cultural contexts. The medicine is applied where the cure is needed most. Sextus critiques specific views of Aristotelians and Stoics. Nāgārjuna directs his *prasaṅgas* toward Abhidharma Buddhists and early Naiyāyikas. Jayarāśi takes on the pretentions of the *pramāṇavādins*.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Śrī Harṣa's harshest criticisms are aimed at one of the preeminent philosophical movements of the late classical period: the extensive realist philosophies of Nyāya and

Mīmāṃsā. I will delve into the details of some of these arguments in the next chapter (section 7.2), but in this section I offer the basic framework and motivations of these arguments.

Existence (*sattā* or *tattva*) is a fundamental concept of realism in the classical Indian context. Existence in this context is typically understood as a real universal that picks out objects in the universe that are ontologically independent of our experience, but which are the intentional objects of veridical cognitions.

Śrī Harṣa presents a variety of arguments against this realist conception of existence. Three examples are his argument that *sattā* is not to be inferred from cognition (the Non-Inference from Cognition argument), that *sattā* is a redundant qualification (the Redundant Qualification argument), and that the realists cannot explain the meaning of *tattva,* which is a close synonym of *sattā* (the Indeterminate Meaning argument). I will explain these arguments in depth in the next chapter, but the general idea of the first two arguments is that existence in this sense is simply redundant in that it offers no explanatory value over and above the provisional assumption of existence provided within normal, everyday experience. Within experience we simply do not need the realist conception of existence, and in any case the realists cannot rely on the resources available within experience to establish the existence of that which is beyond experience.

The third argument starts with the Nyāya conception that the meaning of a word is its referent. Śrī Harṣa then asks what the reference of existence/reality (*tattva*) could possibly be. It cannot be the object of experience, because we also have objects of experience within illusory cognitions such as mirages or seeing mother-of-pearl as silver. Neither does it make sense to say that existence is the property of all existing things, since that would make existence both the property and property-possessor insofar as all existing things would exist, which would violate the realists' own metaphysical doctrines.

The details of these arguments can be difficult to understand, but Śrī Harṣa's purpose in presenting them is not difficult to understand when you see him as developing *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism. If realism of the Nyāya-Mīmāṃsā type were accepted as true, it would be an obstacle to the kind of mystical experience Śrī Harṣa mentions in the text drawing as it does a strict dualist distinction between cognition and the physical world and between the manifold selves and objects within the universe. Realism would, in other words, make Advaita mystical experience impossible. The sense in which Śrī Harṣa is attempting to open up the space for the possibility of Advaita mysticism is the subject of the next section.

6.4 The Possibility of Mystical Experience

One might think, as Phillips (1995) does, that Śrī Harṣa's trenchant critique of realism is meant to imply the truth of an opposing view such as non-dual idealism. I think Śrī Harṣa's point is subtler than that. My claim is that his critique of realism is meant to open up the *possibility* of mystical, non-dual experience, but this critique does not directly imply that such experience is veridical. Śrī Harṣa is clearing the ground of realist debris, but he is not thereby erecting an edifice of idealism.

In chapter 2, I argued that there was no textual evidence in favor of attributing mysticism to Nāgārjuna. His goal is the cessation of conceptual proliferation; there is no further step into mysticism implied. Śrī Harṣa's situation is different.

Unlike Nāgārjuna, Śrī Harṣa does discuss knowledge gained through meditative states. The end of the KhKh mentions Śrī Harṣa's own meditative experiences. He refers to himself as "he who . . . directly perceives (*sākṣāt kurute*) in meditations (*samādhiṣu*) the ultimate *brahman*, the ocean of bliss."[46] Elsewhere Śrī Harṣa says that his arguments are leading the reader to non-dualism and out of the errors of Nyāya.[47]

I am relying on the characterization of mysticism from William James (1958) according to which mystical states have at least two features: ineffability and noetic quality. Śrī Harṣa describes these experiences as being like states of knowledge in line with *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, but they are ineffable in that they cannot be directly described (although poetic imagery is used). Being non-dualistic, they also have the characteristic of a feeling of oneness, an important part of mystical experience according to other scholars.[48]

According to Ram-Prasad (2002, 204–206), the KhKh is meant to prepare the reader for this experience of non-dual *brahman* by destroying the realist, dualist alternatives. For all of Phillips's talk about Śrī Harṣa's "positive program," even Phillips agrees that there is no direct defense of mystical illumination; he even admits that Granoff has a point about this (Phillips 1995, 80, 82). Phillips locates part of Śrī Harṣa's positive program in his assertion that scripture is a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). However, scripture is at best a provisional *pramāṇa:* even Phillips's own translation of a relevant passage says that it is a *pramāṇa* "after the manner of our opponents" (Phillips 1995, 82).[49] That is, scripture cannot really tell you what non-dual experience of *brahman* is like. At best, it helps you get there, but there's nothing like the real thing.

My own interpretation is that Śrī Harṣa intended his text to serve a similar function: it can help you get to mysticism, but it in no way

substitutes for the real thing. The KhKh is therapy for realists—or those with realist hangovers, anyway—who cannot shake the feeling that the dualist world of everyday experience is to be taken as ultimately real. By attacking the foremost defenders of this position (Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā), Śrī Harṣa aims to leave his readers with an open mind. If philosophers as formidable as Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsākas cannot make realism work, perhaps it is best to try something else.

Śrī Harṣa seems to think non-dualism is the best alternative. But as a devotee of the *prasaṅga* method, I think Śrī Harṣa is simply too aware of the limitations of articulating a theory of non-dualism to be interested in doing so. Instead, his negative philosophical program is meant to suggest the *possibility* of mystical experience. If he had a program as positive as Phillips thinks, such a program would be immediately guilty of an appeal to ignorance of the form: dualist realism is false, therefore non-dualist idealism is true. This is not to mention the numerous problems that arose within Advaita by his time: how *brahman* and the phenomenal world are to be related, how indeterminacy can be determined to be true, what could possibly be said about non-dual *brahman* in dualist language, and so forth.[50]

Śrī Harṣa saw—correctly in my opinion—that any theory of non-dual *brahman* faces serious, perhaps fatal, problems. Perhaps this is because non-dual *brahman* is true but unknowable via philosophical means (in line with *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism) or maybe it demonstrates the limitations of human cognitive abilities to formulate coherent answers to fundamental philosophical questions (a possibility I investigate in the conclusion of this book). That he so thoroughly demonstrates the deep troubles of commonsense realism and that he encourages us to be more open about what experience teaches us about ultimate reality are two of the factors that make Śrī Harṣa not only one of the three pillars of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy, but a great philosopher in his own right.

Before moving on, I should make a comment about mysticism. Mysticism is, at least in contemporary times, often associated with irrationalism, sloppy thinking, wooly headed New Ageism, and the like. As I hope will be obvious when I delve into Śrī Harṣa's meticulous argumentation in the next chapter, this is a thoroughly false characterization of a mystic like Śrī Harṣa. Matilal suggests that rational arguments are useful for mystics for at least two reasons: "First, the logical arguments are useful, for they illuminate the mystical instead of deepening its mystery. . . . Second, the human mind is an incurably restless organ" (Matilal 1977, 24).[51] Granted, Śrī Harṣa's "illumination" is more shining a light on the problems endemic to realism than on the benefits of non-dualism, but it could

be a useful exercise for those with restless minds—namely, philosophers and recovering philosophers. Indeed, one might say that what unites the three pillars of skepticism about philosophy is that they demonstrate how to obtain rest for the restless of mind (although of course Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi are not mystics, seeking the cessation of conceptual proliferation and an enjoyable worldly life respectively).

6.5 Śrī Harṣa's Development of *Upaniṣadic* Mystical Skepticism

In chapter 1, I explained what I called *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism as having two parts:

1. There is mystical knowledge of *ātman/brahman*, and
2. This mystical knowledge cannot be gained through the senses or through philosophical means such as reasoning, analysis, linguistic conceptualization, and so forth.

As Śrī Harṣa is working within the Advaita Vedānta tradition, which in turn is primarily inspired by the *Upaniṣads*, it is not surprising that a philosophical strand from the *Upaniṣads* would find development in Śrī Harṣa's work. While Advaita is often presented in both classical and contemporary sources as focused on the first part of the above characterization, Śrī Harṣa employs skeptical methods similar to those of Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi in service of the second part, undermining the philosophical intelligibility of the means of knowledge and realist conceptions of existence insofar as these are meant to represent ultimate reality.

This second, skeptical part was also developed by earlier Advaitins, albeit not to the extent to which Śrī Harṣa developed it. Śaṅkara, for instance, argues that *brahman* cannot even in principle be known by typical means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) such as perception and inference for the straightforward reason that *brahman* could never be an object of such knowledge (i.e., a *prameya*).[52] In his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, he pokes fun at "bulls of logicians" for their inadequate methods, and claims that *brahman* is "a secure fortress impregnable to logicians."[53] While Śaṅkara thinks the means of knowledge have their place at the level of phenomenal reality, knowledge of *brahman* can only be revealed by scripture (*śruti*), in particular the *Upaniṣads*. As Michael Comans aptly puts it,

The knowledge revealed by the *śruti* does not actually negate

> perceptual knowledge, it does not negate something that is proved by perception, but it negates erroneous notions that are *assumed* to be true on the basis of perceptual data. … The *śruti* teaching of non-duality does not deny that there is a *perception* of duality, but it removes the erroneous idea, deriving from perception, that duality is real. (Comans 2000, 179)

A bit more speculatively, Purushottama Bilimoria has argued that Śaṅkara's rigorous pursuit of non-dual being (*sat*) led to some surprising consequences: being cannot be undifferentiated from non-being (*asat*) and the self (*ātman*) ultimately becomes "denuded" of all characteristics save for bare, tautological necessity (Bilimoria 1997). If Bilimoria is right that this is where Śaṅkara ended up or at least if Śrī Harṣa read Śaṅkara in a similar way, then something like Śrī Harṣa's approach makes perfect sense: there is quite literally nothing positive that could be said about *brahman*. There is nothing for a positive philosophical thesis to assert, and such theses would be mired in dualism in any case. Of course, this is nothing new. Consider the *via negativa* of "not -----, not -----" ("*neti, neti*") in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (e.g., 3.9.26).[54] At best an Advaitin should correct the dualistic errors of others, but about non-dualism itself there would be precious little to say. I won't assess here whether Bilimoria's reading of Śaṅkara is correct or whether Śrī Harṣa read him this way, but it is an intriguing thought that could make sense of why an Advaitin might take Śrī Harṣa's skeptical approach.[55]

As mentioned earlier (section 6.2), Vācaspati Miśra developed the Advaita notion of indeterminacy (*anirvacanīyatva*) with regard to the objects of experience. In this version of indeterminacy, the individual objects of experience are determinate as existent or non-existent within the phenomenal world, but it is indeterminate whether the world of experience as a whole really is as it appears to be in experience (i.e., as mind-independent).[56] In other words, what is indeterminate is the status of the world as we experience it, not individual objects of experience.[57] The indeterminacy of the world in this sense leaves the door open for the possibility of non-dual experience. Furthermore, if one were to come to doubt whether indeterminacy itself could be determined to be true, then perhaps negative attacks on determinacy would still be a plausible route; as Ram-Prasad suggests (2002, 128), this is just the route Śrī Harṣa takes.

Śrī Harṣa was developing *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism not only directly from the *Upaniṣads*, but he was also responding to developments among earlier Advaitins such as Śaṅkara and Vācaspati. Śrī Harṣa developed the skeptical part of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism to an unparalleled degree within the Advaita tradition such

that the mystical part becomes a suggestion of a possibility rather than a positive claim in itself.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have given a general overview of my interpretation of Śrī Harṣa as the third pillar in the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy. I reviewed Śrī Harṣa's intellectual context given the rise of Advaita Vedānta and the realist schools of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā, and then discussed three major interpretations of Śrī Harṣa from Granoff, Phillips, and Ram-Prasad. I then gave an overview of my own interpretation according to which Śrī Harṣa is utilizing similar skeptical methods as Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi in service of a pursuit of the negative side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism. But rather than seeing him as arguing directly in favor of the existence of experience of non-dual *brahman*, Śrī Harṣa should be seen opening up the possibility of such experience through his philosophical demolition of realist alternatives in a manner reminiscent of earlier Indian skeptics about philosophy.

In the next chapter I will delve into the details of some of Śrī Harṣa's arguments. First, I will look at his arguments concerning the means of knowledge and whether skeptics are required to admit their existence in order to participate in debate. Second, I will explore some of his trenchant critiques of realist conceptions of existence (*tattva/sattā*). Looking at these arguments will provide further evidence in favor of my interpretation of Śrī Harṣa as a skeptic about philosophy.

NOTES

1. This date is given by Granoff (1978, 2). While determining dates for most classical Indian philosophers is difficult, most scholars agree that Śrī Harṣa lived sometime in the twelfth century CE (e.g., Matilal 1986; Phillips 1995; Ram-Prasad 2002; Ganeri 2016; and Granoff 2016).

2. *tadanabhyupagacchato 'pi cārvākamādhyamikāder vāgvistarāṇāṃ pratīyamānatvāt.* KhKh, p. 7.

3. The dates of the *Brahmasūtra/Vedāntasūtra* are difficult to determine. Some sources (e.g., Potter 1981; Phillips 1995, etc.) give a range of 200 BCE–200 CE.

4. For overviews of Vedānta, including non-Advaita schools, see Frazier (2014), Gupta (2012, Ch. 13), Taber (2011), Sarma (2011, Chs. 11–13), and Radhakrishnan and Moore (1989, Ch. 15). For more specific studies of Advaita Vedānta, see Timalsina (2009), Deutsch and Dalvi (2004), Forsthoefel (2002), Comans (2000), Malkovsky (2000), Bilimoria (1997), Hacker (1995), Isayeva

(1993), Chakrabarti (1992), Wood (1990), Taber (1983), Potter (1981), and Deutsch (1969).

5. I discussed Gauḍapāda as an example of a mystic in chapter 2 (in the section 2.2).

6. See Comans (2000, 1–2) and Isayeva (1993, Ch. 3) for more on sources for Gauḍapāda's biography, some of which may be somewhat historically dubious. In particular, the idea that Gauḍapāda was the teacher of Śaṅkara's teacher is extremely unlikely given that Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara may have lived over 200 years apart. There is also some controversy about whether Gauḍapāda is the author of every part of the *Āgama Śāstra*, as is traditionally attributed to him (see Wood 1990 for extensive treatment of this controversy).

7. V. Bhattacharya (1989), Isayeva (1993), and Comans (2000) provide traditional idealist readings, while Kaplan (1983), King (1995), and Timalsina (2013) argue for phenomenological readings.

8. For the details surrounding this controversy, see Wood (1990) and King (1995). My own thoughts on this controversy are in Mills (2010).

9. See King (1995, 183).

10. Until recent decades many scholars accepted Śaṅkara dates as 788–820 CE. Most scholars now agree he probably lived somewhere between 650 and 850 CE; the dates most commonly used are c. 700–750 (Phillips 1995; Grimes 2004; Ram-Prasad 2002; Comans 2000; Isayeva 1993). For some of the amusing and amazing —even if historically dubious—stories of Śaṅkara's life, including the story of a debate between Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana judged by Maṇḍana's wife Bhāratī, see Solomon (2016), Doniger (2009, Ch. 18), Grimes (2004), Comans (2000, Ch. 4), Phillips (1995), Isayeva (1993), and Menon and Allen (1960).

11. The authorship of some of these works has been disputed, particularly that of the *Bālabodhinī* and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. See Potter (1981) for helpful summaries of these and other texts from Śaṅkara, including details on authorship issues.

12. This slogan is attributed to the *Bālabodhinī* (Perrett 2016, 142; Gupta 2012, 319 n. 1). The first two statements (*brahma satyaṃ jagat mithyā*) also appear in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 20 (Grimes 2004, 70).

13. Potter (1981, 75) points out that this exact slogan does not appear in Śaṅkara's work, but it became a popular slogan in post-Śaṅkara Advaita. However, something close to this slogan appears in Śaṅkara's *Ātmanātmaviveka* 21 (Potter 1981, 330).

14. Śaṅkara discusses superimposition in the introductory text before *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 1.1.1.

15. Note that Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara use "*prapañca*" to refer to the phenomenal world, whereas for Nāgārjuna it means "conceptual proliferation" (see chapter two on the important place of this idea in Nāgārjuna's philosophical program).

16. This might be called a non-phenomenalist idealism: "an idealist refuter of idealism like Śaṃkara regards or disregards both inner and outer objects as equally objective, equally non-illusory and equally non-real" (Chakrabarti 1992, 97). However, for Śaṅkara "a deeper metaphysical idealism is embraced because nothing but the never-negated pure consciousness is really real" (Chakrabarti 1992, 98). See also Ram-Prasad (1995). Later Advaitins argued that there are three levels of reality: the ultimate non-duality of *brahman*, the provisional level of appearance, and the lowest level of ultimate non-being such as the horn of a rabbit or the son of a barren woman (see Deutsch 1969, Ch. 2; Hacker 1995, Ch. 6; Timalsina 2009, Ch. 4).

17. See chapter 1 (section 1.3) for more on these passages. Also note that a non-

dualist reading of *tat tvam asi* as a strict identity between *tat* and *tvam* may not be grammatically accurate (see Brereton 1986), which is why Olivelle (1996, 155) translates it, as "that's how you are."

18. *Jīva* tends to mean an individual self, while *ātman* can be either the individual self or the essence of selfhood.

19. For more on the concept of sublation (*adhyāsa*), see Deutsch (1969, 15–17), Potter (1981, 82), Bilimoria (1997, 258–260), and Gupta (2012, 147).

20. See *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 1.1.1 (Gambhirananda 1965, 12; Potter 1981, 122).

21. For a slightly different take on the version of the Sublatability Argument in *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 1.1.1, see Rao (1988, 112).

22. For treatment of Sureśvara and Padmapāda, including the issue of whether Sureśvara could be the same person as Maṇḍana Miśra, see Comans (2000).

23. Balasubramanian (1976), Potter (1981, 80), and Hacker (1995, 71–73). See Ram-Prasad (2002, 95–130) for a study of Vācāspati's treatment of *anirvacanīya.* See Rao (1988, Ch. 8) for a treatment of Advaita theories of perceptual error.

24. This is my gloss of *Brahmasiddhi* 1.9 (Potter 1981, 352).

25. See *Pañcapādikā* 18 (Potter 1981, 570).

26. The *Nyāya Sūtra* can be dated to around the time of Nāgārjuna (c. 150–200 CE). See chapter 2 (section 2.3).

27. *pramāṇaprameyasaṃśayaprayojanadṛṣṭāntasiddhāntāvayavatarkanirṇayavādajalpavitaṇḍāh tattvajñānānniḥśreyasādhigamaḥ.* NS 1.1.1. See also Gautama (1999, 37).

28. For a comparison of classical Indian and Hellenistic notions of philosophy as it relates to the highest human goods, see Ganeri (2010).

29. Matilal (1998) is the best introduction to Indian logic currently available. Ganeri (2001b) is also useful.

30. See NS 2.1.12–13, Dasti (2011), and Dasti and Phillips (2016).

31. These dates are based on Phillips (1995), Ram-Prasad (2002), and Laine (2016a), (2016b), and (2016c).

32. Some overviews of Nyāya are Potter (1977b) and Junankar (1978). For more on Nyāya figures or topics including logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, see Vaidya (2013), Phillips (2012), Kronen and Laine (2012), Dasti (2011), Ganeri (2010), Ganeri (2001b), Chakrabarti (1999), Shastri (1997), Gokhale (1992), Chakrabarti (1989), Matilal (1971), Matilal (1986), Matilal (1998), and Tachikawa (1981). For Ganganatha Jha's translation of Gautama's *Nyāya Sūtra* as well as select commentaries such as Vātsyāyana's *Bhāṣya* and Uddyotakara's *Vārttika*, see Gautama (1999).

33. For more on Mīmāṃsā, see Potter (2014), Arnold (2005), Taber (1994), Taber (2005), Taber (2010), Bilimoria (1989), and Freschi (2009).

34. For instance, the Mīmāṃsā philosopher Kumārila argues that the authorlessness of the Vedas is what guarantees their freedom from error, because error is only introduced by authors; he is also pushed by these considerations either into outright atheism or at least an indifference to the existence of a creator (even if God exists, He is not the author of the Vedas). See Bilimoria (1989).

35. For more on the complex relationship between Mīmāṃsā and Advaita, see Phillips (1995, 69–71) and Comans (2000, 167–170).

36. While I concentrate here on Granoff, Phillips, and Ram-Prasad, there has been a growing interest in Śrī Harṣa in recent years (e.g., Maharaj 2014; Ganeri 2012, Ch. 9; Ganeri 2016; Timalsina 2016; Duquette and Ramasubrmanian 2017). I will discuss some of these more recent works along the way, noting how they fit

(or do not) into the framework provided by Granoff, Phillips, and Ram-Prasad.

37. See Granoff (1978, 2), Granoff (2016), and Phillips (1995, 75–77).

38. Other translations of the meaning of *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* are "*Sweetmeats of Refutation*" (Phillips 1995) and "*Amassed Morsels of Refutation*" (Ganeri 2016).

39. I've discussed *vitaṇḍā* as opposed to friendly debate (*vāda*) and debate for defeating an opponent by establishing a contrary position (*jalpa*) in previous chapters. See for instance chapter 1 (section 1.5).

40. Indeed, most skeptics about philosophy would be skeptical about the dogmatic conclusion of epistemological skepticism that we lack knowledge in some domain.

41. Although more recently Ganeri (2016) and Granoff herself (2016) have questioned Śrī Harṣa's Advaita affiliation.

42. See chapter 2 (section 2.1).

43. Granoff (2016) and Ganeri (2016) question Śrī Harṣa's Advaita affiliation on grounds that he does not accept some standard Advaita views such as indeterminacy (*anirvacanīyatva*) (something also noted in Granoff 1978, 54). I think this is to adhere too closely to the letter rather than the spirit of Advaita. There is no reason Śrī Harṣa cannot criticize other Advaitins from within his (admittedly skeptical) Advaita program.

44. I discussed this distinction in the chapters on Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi, especially in chapter 3, in the section 3.1, and in chapter 4, in the section 4.2.

45. For instance, see Matilal (1977), Matilal (1986), and Ganeri (2012).

46. *yaḥ … sākṣāt kurute samādhiṣu parabrahman pramodārṇavam.* KhKh, p. 754. See also Phillips (1995, 75).

47. KhKh, p. 125. See also Phillips (1995, 76).

48. For instance, Gimello (1978) and Stace (1960). See chapter 2, section 2.1, for more on philosophical engagements with mysticism.

49. *para-abhyupagama-rītyā* (KhKh, p. 55). See also Granoff (1978, 124).

50. I touched on the first problem in chapter 6, in the section 6.2. The other two are discussed in chapter 6 as well, in the section 6.5.

51. For another treatment of mysticism and philosophy, see Mohanty (1992, 277–282).

52. For an excellent overview of Śaṅkara's engagement with the means of knowledge *vis-à-vis* his non-dualism, see Comans (2000, 167–184). For a similar treatment, see Ram-Prasad (2002, 80–92).

53. *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* 2.1.20. This translation appears in Comans (2000, 173).

54. See also chapter 1, section 1.3.

55. I thank Purushottama Bilimoria for pointing out his article to me and suggesting a connection with skepticism.

56. This presentation of Vācāspati on *anirvacanīyatva* is based on Ram-Prasad (2002, 95–130).

57. This is what distinguishes Advaita from Yogācāra idealism. See also Chakrabarti (1992).

Chapter 7

Śrī Harṣa on Knowledge, Existence, and the Limits of Philosophy

> *There is conduct by mutual agreement within a debate . . . which is agreeable in that it is not pursued excessively.*
>
> —*Śrī Harṣa,*
> Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya, *p. 23*

The thesis of this chapter is that applying the general interpretation developed in the previous chapter to some of Śrī Harṣa's specific arguments in the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (hereafter: KhKh) makes good sense of both these specific arguments and of Śrī Harṣa's overall purpose as a skeptic about philosophy. I begin with Śrī Harṣa's discussion of the role of the means of knowledge in a proper philosophical debate; he argues, contrary to his realist opponents, that participation in philosophical debate does not commit one to accepting the existence of the means of knowledge, which is precisely the kind of thing a skeptic about philosophy would say. I then look at Śrī Harṣa's critique of realist notions of existence (*sattā* and *tattva*). All of this not only demonstrates that Śrī Harṣa is skeptic about philosophy, but shows that he can remain non-dogmatically open to the *possibility* that there could be non-dual mystical experience of a single reality of pure consciousness (*brahman*) without thereby providing any philosophical arguments *in favor of* such a metaphysical view.

7.1 Debate and the Means of Knowledge

The KhKh consists of four chapters, the first of which is longer than the remaining three chapters. While Śrī Harṣa ranges over a wide variety of topics in all four chapters, a general characterization could be that the first two chapters are primarily concerned with debate,

logic, and epistemology, while chapters three and four focus on philosophy of language and metaphysics.[1]

The first chapter begins with a brief introductory dedication after which Śrī Harṣa presents an objection from an imagined realist opponent, probably a Naiyāyika: "Now, debaters believe there is a restriction of this kind in a disputation: both disputants must agree that those categories exist that are established by the doctrines admitted by all the schools, i.e., *pramāṇas*, etc." (KhKh, p. 5).[2] That is, accepting the existence of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) is required for there to be any meaningful debate at all. This is an expression of Nyāya's basic realist stance, according to which our epistemic activity presupposes the existence of real objects and means of knowing these objects that are at least sometimes successful—a view also expressed in Nyāya philosophers' parasitism objections to idealism (Dasti 2012).

Śrī Harṣa responds by setting up the kind of complex *prasaṅga* argument that Nāgārjuna or Jayarāśi would applaud.[3]

> Others do not accept this. For what is the reason for the disputant to accept the existence of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) and such? 1. Is it because, for speakers both pro and con not accepting that (i.e., the existence of the means of knowledge), it is not possible to begin the practice of debate, which is restricted to the community of those who *do* accept that? 2. Or is it due to being the *cause of* the disputants beginning the practice of debate? 3. Or because it (i.e., the existence of the means of knowledge) is commonly accepted in the world? 4. Or is it because for one who does not accept that, there would be an unwanted consequence with regard to results like victory and ascertaining the truth? (KhKh, p. 6).[4]

As I did with Jayarāśi's Non-Establishment of Difference Argument in chapter 5 (section 5.3), I will use a numbering system for the options (*vikalpas*) of Śrī Harṣa's dismissal of each of these four options as well as various sub-options.

1. Śrī Harṣa counters that the first option, that those who do not accept the existence of the means of knowledge (and other categories) cannot engage in debate, "because one understands the extensive discourses of Cārvākas, Mādhyamikas, and so forth even though they do not accept that (i.e., that the *pramāṇas* exist)" (KhKh, p. 7).[5]
    1.1. The imagined opponent counters that he/she means to say that those who do not accept the existence of the means of knowledge[6] simply cannot prove or disprove anything with

their discourse (KhKh, p. 8). Śrī Harṣa responds that a debate can proceed by two parties, "having necessarily agreed about the characteristics of fallacious arguments" (KhKh, p. 8).[7] That is, a debate can proceed simply by both parties agreeing about what constitutes a fallacious argument; thus, those who do not agree that the means of knowledge exist can participate in a debate insofar as they avoid fallacies and/or point out their opponents' fallacies. This indicates what Naiyāyikas would call a *vitaṇḍā* style of debate in which one proceeds simply by refuting an opponent.[8]

1.2. The opponent then asks how there can be any debate at all, even that which proceeds merely by accepting fallacies, if both parties do not accept that existence of the means of knowledge. Śrī Harṣa responds that he does not mean that debate proceeds after accepting the existence of the means of knowledge; the debate may proceed for those who neither accept nor do not accept the existence of the means of knowledge. Śrī Harṣa then considers three possible options to make sense of the opponent's claim.

1.2.1. He asks, "It is because, in the activity of debate, *both* speakers accept the existence of the means of knowledge, etc.?" (KhKh, p. 10).[9] This would make the opponent's point untenable, since they'd be raising a false objection.

1.2.2. Perhaps both speakers do *not* accept the existence of the means of knowledge, but this would mean that the opponent is as guilty as Śrī Harṣa of the fault in question, and thus guilty of being self-contradictory (KhKh, p. 10).

1.2.3. Or maybe one accepts the existence of the means of knowledge while the other does not? But this is untenable, "because this very debate is also in adherence [with the idea that one participant does not accept the existence of the means of knowledge], and because both parties conform to accepting the same restrictions on debate" (KhKh, p. 10).[10] In this option, the opponent who has already accepted that debate can proceed with one participant not accepting the existence of the means of knowledge, so the opponent must then accept that this is possible. Śrī Harṣa mocks the opponent by saying that he/she is unable to fully understand even his/her own position, much less the opinions of others (KhKh, p. 11–12).

1.3. The opponent then changes course to say that the objection was meant only to apply to a "bad *vaitaṇḍika*" (*dūrvaitaṇḍika*); in fact, students are told that such a person is "not a proper

authority with regard to debate" (*kathānadhikāra*) (KhKh, p. 12). Śrī Harṣa responds, "How would it be stated to students that the Cārvākas and others, have this fault?" (KhKh, p. 12).[11] There are two possibilities:

1.3.1. It cannot be stated before the Cārvākas and others, enter the debate, because a fatal flaw in an argument (*nigrahaḥ*) is only discovered *within* a debate (KhKh, p. 12).

1.3.2. Neither can it be stated after the Cārvākas and others, enter the debate, for the same reason (KhKh, p. 12). It could be that Śrī Harṣa simply means that this statement can only be made during the debate, not as an *a priori* pre-debate announcement. Phyllis Granoff suggests another possibility: "If the *pramāṇas* do not exist, there can be no debate, and if there is to be debate, it is not possible to admit that the *pramāṇas* do not exist" (Granoff 1978, 77–78). That is, if the Nyāya position is correct (and debate presupposes the existence of the means of knowledge), then the Naiyāyikas could never debate the Cārvākas and others, in order to discover that the contrary position of the Cārvākas and others, has a logical flaw.

2. The second main option was that admitting the existence of the means of knowledge is the cause of the disputants initiating a debate.

2.1. But this is not possible, because if it were, the causal power of the means of knowledge with regard to the activity of debate would cease upon the refusal to admit that they exist (KhKh, p. 13). "Therefore, if this were the case, no linguistic activity at all would be produced on the part of those who do not accept the existence of that (i.e., the means of knowledge), but this point has already been made, namely, that it is not possible to deny the linguistic activity of the Mādhyamikas, and so forth" (KhKh, p. 13).[12] Since the Mādhyamikas, Cārvākas, and so forth obviously can and do speak even though they don't accept the means of knowledge, this objection is unfounded.

2.2. The opponent might say instead that the means of knowledge must exist precisely because they are the cause of there being any activity of debate—since we know that the activity of debate exists, so must the means of knowledge exist. But this won't work, either, because the existence of the means of knowledge is the type of thesis that must be proven in a debate (KhKh, p. 14). In other words, the opponent's own rules forbid merely *assuming* the existence of the means of knowledge without establishing such a thesis via the process of debate. Śrī Harṣa goes on to point out that the opponent would have to

rely on fallacious arguments to make this point: mutual dependence (*anyonāśraya*) ensues if the opponent must establish the means of knowledge to have a debate while simultaneously having a debate to establish the means of knowledge, circularity (*cakraka*) ensues if the debate establishes the means of knowledge and then the means of knowledge establish the validity of debate, and infinite regress (*anavasthā*) ensues if the opponent would like to have a second debate to establish the first debate and so forth *ad infinitum* (Granoff 1978, 78). These types of arguments are of course also used by Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi as I've shown in earlier chapters, but they could also be compared to the modes of circularity and infinite regress in Pyrrhonian skepticism (e.g., PH 1.164–177).

2.3. The opponent might say that the cause is the cause of the binding agreement that forms the rules of the debate as agreed to by the participants. But this is inapplicable, because both speakers accept the rules as the basis of establishing truth or victory in the debate (KhKh, p. 16). That is, the goals of a debate can be reached solely because both parties agree to the rules; acceptance of the means of knowledge is superfluous.

2.4. The opponent then worries that there would be confusion about the debate and its results if the basis of the debate is merely agreement of the participants rather than anything known through the means of knowledge. This is not correct, however, since the rules are self-evident as they've been developed in the world successively over many generations (KhKh, p. 16). We can trust the rules, in other words, because they have repeatedly been shown to be successful in the practice of debate in the past. Again, the means of knowledge are superfluous.

2.5. Perhaps one could grant the existence of the means of knowledge for the same reasons as one accepts the rules of debate, that is, because they're agreed upon as the means of ascertaining truth and victory within the debate. This is unreasonable, though, because "the activity of debate is possible merely by restrictions on the practice of debate in this way (i.e., in the way described earlier)" (KhKh, p. 17).[13] Śrī Harṣa goes on to say that even if both speakers *did* accept the means of knowledge, they still could not ascertain truth or victory within a debate without also agreeing to the rules (KhKh, p. 17). So again, either agreeing or not agreeing about the existence of the means of knowledge is superfluous when it comes to the conduct of a debate.

3. The third of the original options was that the means of knowledge are a "worldly practice" (*lokavyavahāra*), that is, something established by everyday, worldly discourse (*lokasiddha*). Śrī Harṣa then asks, "Is this practice based on a proof (*sādhāraṇa*), or is it based on the vulgar, common people (*pāmara*), and so forth?" (KhKh, p. 18).[14]
    3.1. The first option (that it's based on a proof) doesn't work, because it's difficult to determine anything with regard to the activity of deliberation insofar as the whole issue to be considered is how one should determine the rules for debate (KhKh, p. 18). That is, the opponent can't say the means of knowledge are established *before* the debate takes place, since, in a similar way as option 2.2, one would need the process of a debate in order to establish the means of knowledge as being based on a proof.
    3.2. Nor will it work to say that this option is established by the activity of the common people. If it did work, the opponent would have to accept ideas he/she considers to be mistaken such as the idea that the soul is identified with the body, since many common people accept such ideas (KhKh, p. 18), a classic example of an unwanted consequence (*prasaṅga*) for Śrī Harṣa's opponent.
        3.3. Next the opponent objects, "This is not accepted, because it is found to be sublated by later examination" (KhKh, p. 18).[15] Śrī Harṣa responds that if the means of knowledge themselves are sublated by later examination, then they, too, should not be accepted; but if, on the other hand, they are to be known by not being sublated, then they would be known by not being sublated rather than by the activity of the common people (KhKh, p. 18).
4. The fourth and final of the original options was that if the disputants do not accept the existence of the means of knowledge, then there would be no means of determining results of the debate with regard to ascertainment of truth or victory.
    4.1. Śrī Harṣa's first point is that even those who are indifferent with regard to the existence or non-existence of the means of knowledge can still adopt the rules of a debate; furthermore, "if this unwanted consequence were to apply to me, then that same unwanted consequence would apply to you, too" (KhKh, p. 19).[16] That is, because both Śrī Harṣa and the opponent proceed merely by accepting the rules of debate, then the same faults must be applied to both.
    4.2. The opponent then objects: "The existence of the activity of the debate itself must be accepted by those who are bound by

that specific agreement, which is the cause of the linguistic activity" (KhKh, p. 19).[17] The opponent goes on to explain Śrī Harṣa's point that the debate proceeds merely by accepting the rules directly implies the existence of the debate itself, not to mention the existence of fallacies as well as the parts of an inference. This in turn implies the existence of the means of knowledge: because Śrī Harṣa accepts the *effects* of the means of knowledge (namely, ascertainment of truth and victory within a debate as determined by fallacies, etc.), he must accept the causal power (*kriyā*) of the means of knowledge, which of course directly implies their existence, because anything with causal power must exist. In a manner similar to his earlier points (e.g., 2.2, 3.1, etc.), Śrī Harṣa responds that this doesn't deliver the opponent from his original objection, because what the opponent desires to prove can only be proven *after* the debate has begun (KhKh, p. 19–20).

4.3. The opponent then claims to avoid the fault suggested by Śrī Harṣa because what is required for debate is *cognition* (*jñāna*) of the existence of the means of knowledge, but not their existence itself (KhKh, p. 21). The idea seems to be that the disputants must have some notion of the means of knowledge in order to proceed, but they need not have fully apprehended or proven the existence of the means of knowledge.[18] Śrī Harṣa considers two options for making sense of this suggestion: "With regard to that, do you think their existence should be accepted merely because they are perceived? Or because one perceives that they are not sublated?" (KhKh, p. 21).[19]

4.3.1. Śrī Harṣa responds, "It cannot be the first of the two options, due to the unwanted consequence in which one perceives the existence of the appearance of non-existent water in a desert mirage, and so forth" (KhKh, p. 21).[20] If one should accept the existence of the means of knowledge merely because one perceives them, then likewise one ought to believe that a mirage is real merely because one perceives the appearance of water; however, in the case of a mirage, the opponent thinks the appearance should not be accepted as real, even provisionally. Therefore, in order to remain consistent, the opponent shouldn't accept the means of knowledge provisionally either.

4.3.2. Śrī Harṣa considers two ways to make sense of the second option: either the means of knowledge are not perceived to be sublated during the debate on the part of the speaker, the opponent, or the debate judge (*madhyasthā*), or they are not perceived to be sublated by

anyone at any time (KhKh, p. 21).

4.3.2.1. The first sub-option won't work: just because something is not seen to be sublated by three people at one time (i.e., the speaker, opponent, and judge during the debate), does not mean it could not be seen to be sublated by other people at numerous other times. One should not admit the existence of something just because two or three people have not seen it to be sublated. This leaves the second sub-option as the only viable option, namely, "whenever there is something that cannot be sublated by anyone at any time, only that is to be accepted as existent" (KhKh, p. 21).[21]

It should be noted that this move suggests something similar to Śaṅkara's Sublatability Argument discussed in the previous chapter (section 6.1), which perhaps gives a hint of Śrī Harṣa's Advaita allegiance. However, sublation in some form is also an important concept for his realist opponents in Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā: Nyāya claims that one can trust perceptions insofar as they are not contradicted by other means of knowledge (in a somewhat coherentist vein), while Mīmāṃsā, like Advaita, accepts the theory of intrinsic validity (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*) according to which we should approach our experience with a basic epistemic trust.[22]

4.3.2.2. But the idea that one should only accept that which is not seen to be sublated at any time won't work, either. As long as the disputants and the judge accept the existence of fallacies at the time of the debate, that's all they need to proceed with the debate. Again, the existence of means of knowledge that are eternally unsublated is superfluous, not to mention thoroughly impractical, since everyday practice gets along just fine without such philosophically elaborate beliefs concerning the existence of the means of knowledge. In fact, Śrī Harṣa explains that this is why it is said, "the debate begins by perceiving the existence of the means of knowledge that are conducive to everyday practice" (KhKh, p. 22).[23] To the extent that a debate requires anything like the means of knowledge, they must only be accepted in the context of their utility for everyday practice (*vyavahāra*).

This may seem similar to the idea of provisional acceptance offered by the opponent earlier (option 4.3), although the opponent seems to think that such provisional acceptance would incline one to a deeper acceptance of their existence as well, an inclination that Śrī Harṣa has rejected in the previous options. Śrī Harṣa's idea, on the other hand, seems to be in line with the Advaita position that the everyday, empirical world works well enough in terms of its own assumptions, but that once one begins to question these assumptions, particularly regarding the sublatability and ultimate coherence of everyday experience, the assumptions of the empirical world can be seen to be far less secure than most of us think. It should be noted that neither here nor elsewhere does Śrī Harṣa argue directly in favor of the existence of non-dual *brahman.* As I suggested previously (section 6.4), Śrī Harṣa's ultimate aim is merely to suggest the *possibility* of mystical experience by removing the realists' objections.

4.4. The opponent has one more major objection: perhaps when it is said that the judge decides by these particular rules of debate, this implies that one must accept that the perception of the judge becomes a real object of perception (KhKh, p. 23). But, Śrī Harṣa says, "But this should not be said: even if one were to accept the existence of the last perception, then, while one is thinking of that perception's existence, one would only be able to rely on a separate perception of its reality" (KhKh, p. 23).[24] In other words, the only way to ascertain the existence of the first perception would be through a thought about that second perception, but this second mental act is still a perception, not an ascertainment of existence. This would at best create an infinite regress wherein one keeps trying to ascertain the existence of one cognition by means of another, *ad infinitum.*

4.4.1. Nor should this entail the existence of a real infinite regress. There is a rule that one only needs to follow three or four more cognitions to determine whether the original cognition is trustworthy, a rule that works perfectly fine in everyday life (KhKh, p. 23).[25] So one need not accept the reality of an infinite regress, because doing so is unnecessary.

4.4.2. The opponent objects that if the last cognition in the series is non-existent, then all the other cognitions in that

series will be non-existent as well, which in turn will lead to the collapse of all everyday practice. Śrī Harṣa responds that, even if the regress ensued and all cognitions were ultimately non-existent, even then people in the world in fact rest content after three or four cognitions. It is therefore the same in a debate, "because there is conduct by mutual agreement within a debate, having been bound by an agreement, which is agreeable in that it is not pursued excessively" (KhKh, p. 23).[26] Agreeing upon rules in Śrī Harṣa's provisional sense is far more practical and agreeable than the opponent's sense, since it can be done quickly; and furthermore, it is all the participants need in order to begin a debate. One shouldn't engage in too much thought about the rules (i.e., they shouldn't be "pursued excessively"), because doing so would be superfluous and, as Śrī Harṣa argues later, will simply lead to further conceptual difficulties.

4.4.3. The opponent might say that it is possible for a cognition to have existence in itself, which would mean that an infinite regress does not arise and which provides a basis for everyday practice. However, Śrī Harṣa says that this view has the unwanted consequence that it still generates an infinite regress, something he will explain in another part of the text on the self-illumination of cognitions. Furthermore, even on the opponent's view, everyday practice is really based on the self-existence of a *cognition* of an object, but it is not based on the existence of the object itself (such as a pot, etc.). "In exactly the same way, a non-existent cognition, which is equally unreal (as the object) is the basis of everyday practice, and nothing else" (KhKh, p. 25).[27] The idea here is that the opponent has been forced to agree that the object itself does not serve as the basis of everyday practices such as debates, and so the opponent has no reason to deny that non-existent things can be the basis of the debate. Alternatively, Śrī Harṣa's point may be that just as the opponent says both the object and the cognition are real, even though it is the cognition that does the work, so could someone say that the object and cognition are equally *unreal*, even though it is the unreal cognition that does the work.[28] Hence, whether one accepts the existence of objects or not, the debate can proceed in exactly the ways that Śrī Harṣa has been describing throughout this section.[29]

And so Śrī Harṣa has systematically undermined the opponent's view that the debate itself necessitates that both parties accept the existence of the means of knowledge. Because it is possible for the debate to proceed without such acceptance, Śrī Harṣa is free to embark upon the various courses of his *Buffet of Destruction*.

This section of the KhKh makes the most sense as an expression of the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy for two reasons. First, it is set up in a *prasaṅga* form of argument exactly like those used by Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi. Second, Śrī Harṣa demonstrates that his goal of overturning his opponents' views does not, contrary to Nyāya, commit him to acceptance of an epistemological view, which places him within the *vitaṇḍā* style of debate. Additionally, his responses to the third and fourth options show that he is developing a particularly Advaita form of skepticism, which can be traced back to *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

7.2 Critique of Concepts of Existence (*sattā*/*tattva*)

The fundamental concept in both the metaphysical and epistemological dimensions of Nyāya realism is existence (*sattā* or *tattva*). *Sattā* in this sense is not an ontologically neutral term; it does not function merely as a copula, nor is it in line with contemporary deflationary theories of truth.[30] Rather, *sattā* should be understood as a real universal that inheres in objects that have the following features: they are ontologically independent from cognition, they are not sublated, they are the intentional objects of veridical cognition, and their real features are not conceptually constructed. This is the fundamental basis of the realism of Nyāya. The doctrine of *sattā* is the deepest philosophical expression of Nyāya's basic realist stance and understanding of reality.[31]

Realism of this sort constitutes the main, although not exclusive, philosophical target of Śrī Harṣa's KhKh. The reason is perhaps that Nyāya constituted the foremost philosophical opposition of his day; by the twelfth century CE Buddhist philosophy was becoming less predominant on the philosophical scene, while Nyāya and Vedānta, especially Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, had become the major players.[32] Philosophically speaking, Nyāya is particularly troubling for Śrī Harṣa in that if realism were true, it would block the possibility for veridical non-dual mystical experience. In this section I will consider three of Śrī Harṣa's arguments against this Nyāya conception of *sattā*: his arguments that *sattā* cannot be inferred from cognition (the Non-Inference from Cognition argument), that *sattā* is a redundant

qualification (the Redundant Qualification argument), and that it is impossible to explain the meaning of *tattva,* which is a close synonym of *sattā* (the Indeterminate Meaning argument).[33]

A version of the first argument appears in the argument concerning debate and the means of knowledge discussed in the previous section. In option 4.3, the opponent claims that the mere cognition of the existence (*sattā*) of the means of knowledge is enough for a debate to proceed, but Śrī Harṣa counters that the mere cognition of *sattā* does not imply the reality of *sattā* any more than the mere cognition of water in a mirage implies the reality of water in that location (KhKh, p. 21). Ram-Prasad helpfully locates this argument within the larger Advaita view that the world of experience has a sort of everyday, provisional existence. Thus, according to Ram-Prasad, existence (*sattā*) is an assumption within our experience in that Advaitins including Śrī Harṣa are not—at least not within normal experience—denying the reality of *sattā* as a feature of our cognitive engagement with the world (Ram-Prasad 2002, 168–170).[34] It *seems* within our everyday experience as if the objects of cognition have independent existence. Insofar as Śrī Harṣa agrees with the realists about the assumption of *sattā*, their further theoretical postulation is simply superfluous. It does nothing that the mere assumption does not already do.

Śrī Harṣa is denying that we must accept the deeper Nyāya thesis about *sattā* merely because we assume it or have a cognition of it within experience. This inference is no more valid than an inference to the reality of water from the cognition of water in a mirage. Furthermore, Śrī Harṣa is hinting at a deeper point that one cannot use the data of cognition to make any point whatsoever about aspects of reality beyond cognition.

The argument that *sattā* cannot be inferred from cognition, or the Non-Inference from Cognition argument, can be summed up as follows:

1. We have the cognition of *sattā* within experience, or in other words, we have the assumption of *sattā*.
2. But one cannot infer from the cognition of something that that thing has an existence outside of cognition, as in the case of the cognition of water in a mirage.
3. Therefore, realists cannot use the cognition/assumption of *sattā* as a basis for their realist view of *sattā* as independent of cognition.

The second argument is that *sattā* is simply a redundant qualification of the objects of experience. A feature of the concept of *sattā* is that it qualifies all existing objects; it is what all existing

objects have in common. In the context of a discussion of the existence (*sattā*) of causation, Śrī Harṣa considers the idea that *sattā* would be an internal, essential part of the cause. He rejects this, however, because "the fallacy of having itself as its own basis (*svāśrayatvam*) would obtain since its own qualifier (*viśiṣṭa*) is partly dependent on itself" (KhKh, p. 29).[35] That is, if *sattā* just is part of the cause itself, then to posit that it possesses the qualifier of *sattā* adds nothing to the concept of the cause itself. Ram-Prasad compares this to a referential tautology: "To say, 'this tiger exists' is to say 'this tiger (which exists) exists'" (Ram-Prasad 2002, 171). Likewise, positing *sattā* as part of the internal essence of a cause adds absolutely nothing on top of the experiential assumption of *sattā* as discussed in the previous argument. Again, the realist notion of *sattā* is superfluous.

Perhaps another way to make sense of *sattā* as a qualification of objects is to say that *sattā* exists separately *outside* of the objects themselves. Unsurprisingly, Śrī Harṣa also rejects this option, "because it is seen invariably that that which is separate from its self-dependence, being already possessed of that which is outside its self-dependence, is not in that qualifier in itself, and neither can that very *sattā* be in that (i.e., in that qualifier)" (KhKh, p. 29).[36] The rule in question here is that that quality must be distinct from that which it qualifies.[37] For example, one might say of a book (that which is qualified) that it is green (the quality), but it is simply uninformative to say that a book is a book, since being a book is already its nature. Likewise, Śrī Harṣa's point is that it is simply uninformative to say that existing things possess the quality of existence (*sattā*), since existing is already part of their nature, at least as assumed within experience as discussed with regard to the previous argument. Once again, *sattā* is shown to be superfluous.[38]

The argument that *sattā* is a redundant qualification, or the Redundant Qualification argument, can be summed up as follows:

1. *Sattā* is either a qualifier internal or external to existing things.
2. *Sattā* cannot be internal because a qualifier cannot be part of itself, making *sattā* a redundant qualifier (it would be merely part of the essence already).
3. *Sattā* cannot be external because a qualifier must be distinct from that which it qualifies, but *sattā* is supposed to be in all existing things already, which makes it a redundant qualifier.
4. Therefore, *sattā* is a redundant qualifier that adds nothing to our understanding of experience.

The third argument I will consider is that it is impossible to explain the meaning of the notion of reality/existence (*tattva*). *Tattva* is a close synonym of *sattā* in that both can mean existence, although *tattva*

(literally, "this-ness") is often translated in various contexts as reality, truth, essence, or principle.[39] The idea that veridical awareness (*pramā*) can be defined in terms of access to reality is a major plank of Nyāya's epistemological realism. In tearing up this plank, Śrī Harṣa is engaging in his destruction of the bases of realism.[40]

This argument begins:

> The idea that "veridical awareness (*pramā*) is experience of existence (*tattva*)" does not make sense, because it is not possible to explain the meaning of the word "existence (*tattva*)." For it is said that existence (*tattva*) is the being (*bhāva*) of *that*, and the meaning is that which is the subject being discussed (*prakṛta*ṃ). However, within this subject being discussed here nothing that exists is being referred to by the word "that." (KhKh, p. 130)[41]

Typically in classical India—and especially in Nyāya—the meaning of a word was primarily understood to be its referent, so naturally Śrī Harṣa wonders what the referent of the word "that (*tad*)" might be insofar as "that" is required to understand the meaning of "*tattva*."[42] Of course he is going to argue that no such referent can be found, which in turn means that the meaning of "*tattva*" is unspecified at best, or at worst it is an entirely meaningless concept.

The opponent claims that "that (*tad*)" refers to the intentional object (*viṣaya*), or what it is that one is aware of in experience, which is related to and established by cognition (KhKh, p. 130). Śrī Harṣa will have none of this, of course. Much as in section 4.3.1 (see p. 143 above) of the argument on debate, he appeals to illusory cognitions: "because illusory experiences are not excluded due to the possibility of an experience having the intentional object (*viṣaya*) in itself that is, for example, silver, even when there is no silver, etc. present" (KhKh, p. 130).[43] The point is that if the opponents want to appeal to experience to refer to something outside of experience, then this will not work, because *from the inside* the experience of silver and mother-of-pearl are exactly the same when one is having a non-veridical experience of mistaking mother-of-pearl for silver.

This raises a deeper problem for realism. Realism, at least of Nyāya's epistemological variety, is predicated on the fundamental distinction between veridical and illusory experiences, which could be understood in terms of contemporary disjunctivism (Dasti 2012). But there is no principled way to demarcate veridical and illusory cognitions *from within experience*, at least not in the realists' sense. Śrī Harṣa may be perfectly happy to admit the distinction for practical purposes in what Ram-Prasad calls the assumption of existence. The realists' problems occur when they attempt to go beyond

experience.[44] Therefore, Nyāya realism falls prey to a contradiction: it requires a fundamental distinction between veridical and non-veridical cognition, but the theory itself cannot make sense of the meaning or knowability of this distinction.

Śrī Harṣa wraps up this argument with another unwanted consequence (*prasaṅga*): "Furthermore, by way of unwanted consequence (*prasaṅgena*) 'existence' (*tattva*) would have the meaning of the word 'non-existence' (*atattva*), since a veridical awareness (*pramā*) would turn out to be non-veridical in the case where the qualified thing is part of the property-possessor (*dharmin*)" (KhKh, p. 131).[45] The idea seems to be this: The opponents want to claim that *tattva* is a property of all existing things, but also at the same time *tattva* is *part of* all existing things. Hence, *tattva* is both the property and property-possessor: all real things (which are property-possessors) are real (which is a property). We have already seen that this sort of self-qualification move will not work as demonstrated in one of the horns of the dilemma in the Redundant Qualification argument. Similarly the problem here is that insofar as all real things are the property-possessors, their properties ought to be distinct from them; that is, they would have to be *atattva*—something other than *tattva*. Again we have a contradiction: The Nyāya realist theory requires that all existing things possess the property of existence, but by this theory's own requirements, existing things *cannot* possess the property of existence.

The argument that it is impossible to explain the meaning of the notion of existence (*tattva*), or the Indeterminate Meaning argument, can be summarized as follows:

1. The word "*tattva*" is supposed to refer to the being of the intentional object (*viṣaya*) of cognition.
2. But this theory does not exclude the intentional objects of illusory cognitions (e.g., of mother-of-pearl as silver, etc.).
3. "*Tattva*" is supposed to be a property of all existing things.
4. But this theory has the unwanted consequence (*prasaṅga*) that "*tattva*" would have to refer to something other than the property-possessors (i.e., all existing things).
5. Therefore, "*tattva*" does not refer to existence as intended, which means that the meaning of "*tattva*" is difficult, if not impossible, to determine.

Thus, Śrī Harṣa uses these arguments to demonstrate that the basic notion of existence (*sattā/tattva*) cannot be established in the terms set by his Nyāya opponents. In the next section I will show that these

arguments, along with his argument on debate, give us glimpses of the ways in which Śrī Harṣa attempts to demonstrate the limits of philosophical inquiry, which is fully in line with his sophisticated development of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

7.3 Śrī Harṣa and the Limits of Philosophy

The arguments presented in the previous sections are merely a few tastes of the vast buffet of philosophical demolition on offer in Śrī Harṣa's *Buffet of Destruction* (KhKh). Having investigated a few specific arguments, I would like to move back to the more general question of what Śrī Harṣa intends these arguments to accomplish.

In my opinion Śrī Harṣa's problem with other philosophers isn't so much that their arguments and conclusions are incoherent in their own terms, although of course he has tried to show that they are; rather, his problem is that these conclusions go *too far*. They try to use the resources available to human beings within our normal experience of the world to formulate rigid conclusions about matters far beyond what these resources can establish.[46]

In the argument concerning debate and the means of knowledge, for example, Śrī Harṣa attempts to demolish the opponent's notion that the mere existence of debate entails the existence of the means of knowledge in the robust sense intended by Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā realists. Debate and other forms of everyday practice proceed successfully whether we accept anything like fully established means of knowledge. On this point the similarities are clear between Śrī Harṣa and his skeptical predecessors, Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi: they all refuse to agree that everyday practice, including engaging in philosophical debate, commits them to an epistemological view concerning the means of knowledge.

Likewise Śrī Harṣa's critique of the realist notion of existence (*sattā*) is intended to show that such a metaphysically elaborate thesis is simply unnecessary. Not only is such a metaphysically transcendent notion redundant when we already possess a notion of existence within experience, such a notion is incoherent and perhaps entirely meaningless within the terms set by the realists themselves.

This sort of attitude that philosophical conclusions are unnecessary for the activities of everyday life is a mark of the Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy. The differences in the three pillars, however, is that Jayarāśi is content to simply enjoy everyday life, while Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa see this attitude as part of larger projects: Buddhist non-attachment and the preparation for the possibility of mysticism respectively.

Ram-Prasad places Śrī Harṣa's ontologically neutral stance within the context of what he refers to as Advaita non-realism; specifically, he sees Śrī Harṣa as developing Vācaspati's version of the theory of indeterminacy (*anirvacanīyatva*), which is the idea that we can determine neither that the object of cognition is real nor that it is unreal (Ram-Prasad 2002, 192–197).[47] I doubt that Śrī Harṣa wants to accept a version of the doctrine of indeterminacy since the very acceptance of such a doctrine would belie the efforts of the rest of the KhKh. Nonetheless, I think he has incorporated indeterminacy perhaps less as a view and more as an attitude of ontological indifference that is cultivated through the demonstration of the inadequacies of his opponents' views. He cannot quite *argue* that his opponents have surpassed some specifiable boundaries of philosophy; rather, he attempts to demonstrate this by showing the internal contradictions and redundancies within those views.

Concerning both the means of knowledge and *sattā*, Śrī Harṣa is attempting to show the ways in which realist philosophers overstep the boundaries of philosophy in much the same way that his *Upaniṣadic* forebears did hundreds of years earlier, albeit in a far more intellectually complex fashion given the sophistication of his opponents near the end of the classical period. Unlike the *Upaniṣadic* philosophers, Śrī Harṣa is far more focused on the negative side of mystical skepticism and seems to see this negative critique as pointing merely to the possibility of a wholly different kind of experience.

7.4 Anti-dogmatism and the Possibility of Mysticism

In both the popular and philosophical imaginations of the present day, mysticism is often equated with dogmatism: mystics are thought to cling to their beliefs irrespective of common sense or publicly available reasons. Indeed, one of the most common ways to doubt whether Indian philosophy is really philosophy is to dismiss is as mystical, and thus outside the bounds of philosophical rationality (and therefore properly outside the bounds of philosophy departments). As I discussed in section 6.4, however, this characterization of mysticism simply will not do in the case of Śrī Harṣa. The KhKh is, like almost all classical Indian texts, packed with wall-to-wall argumentation, samples of which I have presented in this chapter.

In opposition to the popular view of mysticism as dogmatism, I want to say that Śrī Harṣa uses his arguments to cultivate a distinctively non-dogmatic attitude about what philosophy can do for us, a deep intellectual humility. But neither is he particularly

dogmatic about insisting that mystical insight will inevitably follow from backing off from our more grandiose philosophical delusions. Philosophy can, at best, be used against itself to open up the mere possibility of mystical experience of non-dual *brahman*, but philosophy cannot—not even in principle—be used to *argue for* or even coherently articulate a thesis of non-dualism.

Of course, Śrī Harṣa does say at the end of the text that he has had such mystical experiences in his meditations (KhKh, p. 754; Phillips 1995, 75). It may be that he has, as Granoff claims, a "firm faith" that his investigation "could lead in only one direction: to a denial of the reality of the visible world and thence to the ultimate religious experience that he describes as 'sinking into the nectar of the self'" (Granoff 2016, 296). Ganeri has a somewhat different take in claiming that Śrī Harṣa "leaves us somewhat uncertain whether we should be searching for a new way to do philosophy, a way that doesn't require us to participate in ungrounded intellectual activities, or whether we are meant to abandon philosophy altogether and adopt quieter, less aggressive, ways of approaching truth" (Ganeri 2016, 16).

My own thought is that, while Śrī Harṣa perhaps hopes that the reader will embark upon a quest for mystical insight in the face of failed attempts at philosophical insight, he is far too self-aware of the problems he has raised not only for his opponents but even for Advaita itself to argue for or even attempt to fully articulate such hopes. Whereas he discusses mysticism, he says nothing at all about new ways of doing philosophy; although there could have been a hope implied in some way by his philosophical activities, I think the negative, *prasaṅga* thrust of the text militates against such an interpretation.

The *Buffet of Destruction*, then, leaves us—appropriately enough—having lost our appetite for constructive philosophical activity. Śrī Harṣa is a skeptic about philosophy like Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi before him, but with the additional inspiration of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

Śrī Harṣa perhaps comes closer to modern forms of epistemological skepticism, such as skepticism about the external world, than Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi. After all, he argues vociferously against realist epistemologies wherein we can and do know the world as it is, but he also refrains from taking the straightforward idealist approach that our experience is all there is. The world itself remains beyond our cognitive grasp. Is Śrī Harṣa then a forerunner of a Cartesian skepticism about the external world?[48]

I think not. Modern external-world skepticism concludes with a claim about everyday knowledge of the external world: namely, that we don't have it. Śrī Harṣa, on the other hand, resolutely refuses to

make any claims about everyday knowledge. His target is always various philosophers' claims about knowledge; in fact, as we have seen in this chapter, he often appeals to the everyday sense of existence *at the expense of* the philosophers' elaborate theories. It is nonetheless the case that his critiques were a major theoretical impetus for the development of Navya Nyāya starting with Gaṅgeśa (c. fourteenth century), who perhaps saw Śrī Harṣa's skepticism as something like Cartesian methodological skepticism that provided a theoretical challenge to be overcome by a reworking of Nyāya realism.[49] Yet, however, later philosophers may have responded to Śrī Harṣa, he himself did not see his work as a challenge that could be overcome, at least not with more philosophical theory. So, while Śrī Harṣa may focus more than either Nāgārjuna or Jayarāśi on the relationship between cognition and the world and his work was later understood as a methodological hurdle toward theoretical refinement, he should not be understood as a skeptic about our knowledge of the external world.

His anti-dogmatic attitude is aimed squarely at philosophers, which is of course one of the major family resemblances of skepticism about philosophy as opposed to modern epistemological skepticism. Once we are free of philosophers' dogmatic pretentions that constrain the mind, we are free to explore at least the possibility of mystical apprehension of non-dualism. Śrī Harṣa's reticence about the nature of such experience is not a failing but a feature of his philosophical practice.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have applied the general interpretation articulated in the previous chapter to two areas of Śrī Harṣa's critique: debate and the means of knowledge as well as the concept of existence (*sattā* or *tattva*). I have argued that Śrī Harṣa uses these arguments to cultivate his own instantiation of skepticism about philosophy. In doing so, he demonstrates that his opponents are transgressing the limits of philosophical rationality while he himself remains non-dogmatically ontologically neutral. This attitude furthermore is meant to open up the mere possibility of mystical experience of non-dualism, although Śrī Harṣa does not argue for or directly articulate such experience. Thus, Śrī Harṣa draws on the types of arguments developed by earlier skeptics about philosophy like Nāgārjuna and Jayarāśi, but in his case it is to offer a subtle and sophisticated development of the negative side of *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism.

To what extent are the arguments of Śrī Harṣa convincing? Should we adopt his ontologically neutral attitude? What can we learn from

him or from the other pillars of classical Indian skepticism about philosophy? I mentioned in the introduction that the study of skepticism about philosophy in India and elsewhere has been deeply personal for me, but that it also points to ideas that are relevant to philosophers today. In the conclusion of this book I turn to these topics.

NOTES

1. For more on the history and structure of the KhKh, see Solomon (1959), Granoff (1978), Jha (1986), Phillips (1995), Ram-Prasad (2002), and Granoff (2016).

2. *atha kathāyām vādinoḥ niyamam etāḍṛsaṃ manyate "pramāṇadayaḥ sarvatantrasiddhāntayā siddhāḥ santīti kathkaābhyām abhyupeyam"* (KhKh, p. 5). Note: All citations of the KhKh are from the Chowkhamba edition (Śrī Harṣa 1970) unless otherwise noted.

3. This argument takes place on KhKh, p. 6–25. My understanding of the argument has benefitted from consulting translations by Granoff (1978) and Jha (1986). For a differing treatment of this section, see Ram-Prasad (2002, 133–157), Matilal (1977, 20–22), and Timalsina (2016, 315–320).

4. *tad apare na kṣamante tathā hi pramāṇādīnām sattvaṃ yad abhyupeyaṃ kathakena tatkasya hetoḥ (1) kiṃ tad anabhyupagacchadbhyāṃ vādiprativādibhyāṃ tad abbhyupagamāhityaniyatasya vāgvyavahārasya pravartayitum śakyatvāt, (2) uta kathakābhyāṃ pravartanīyavāgvyavahāraṃ prati hetutvāt, (3) uta lokasiddhatvāt, (4) uta vā tad anabhyupagamasya tattvanirṇayavijayaphalātiprasañjakatvāt / KhKh, p. 6.*

5. *tadanabhyupagacchato 'pi cārvākamādhyamikāder vāgvistarāṇāṃ pratīyamānatvāt /* KhKh, p. 7.

6. In the remainder of this argument, please understand "means of knowledge" to include the other Nyāya categories, as Śrī Harṣa consistently uses the compound *pramāṇādi*, which means "*pramāṇas* and so forth."

7. *sadvacanābhāsalakṣaṇayogitvam ity avaśyābhyupeyaṃ.* KhKh, p. 8.

8. For more on *vitaṇḍā*, see chapter 1 (section 1.5).

9. *kiṃ pramāṇādināṃ sattvabyupagamābhyāṃ vādibhyāṃ pravartitāyāṃ kathāyām?* KhKh, p. 10.

10. *tathaiva kathāntarasyāpi prasakteḥ ubhayābhypagamānurodhitvāc ca kathāniyamasya /* KhKh, p. 10.

11. *śiṣyādīn pratyapi 'cārvākader doṣoyam ityābhidhātavyam kathaṃ ca tathā syāt /* KhKh, p. 12.

12. *tathā sati tatsattvānabhyupagantṛṇāṃ vāgvyavahārasvarūpam eva na niṣpadyeta hetvanupapatteḥ, uktaś cāyam artho yanmādyamikādivāgvyavahāraṇāṃ svarūpāpalāpo na śakyate iti / (KhKh, p. 13).*

13. *tādṛṣavyvahāraniyamamātreṇaiva kathāpravṛtyupaptteḥ* (KhKh, p. 17).

14. *pāmarādisādhāraṇavyavahāro vā? (KhKh, p. 18).* *Pāmara* could be translated more colloquially as "riff raff."

15. *paścāt tad vicārabādhatayānābyupeyate (KhKh, p. 18).*

16. *tasya yadi māṃ prati phalātiprasaṅjakatvaṃ, tadā tvāṃ pratyapi samānaḥ prasaṅgaḥ* (KhKh, p. 19).

17. *niyatavāgvyavahārakriyāsamayabandhena kathāṃ pravartayatāpi vyavahārasattā 'byupagantavyā* (KhKh, p. 19).

18. Granoff and Jha both translate *jñāna* as "knowledge" here (Granoff 1978, 83; Jha 1986, 11). This is fine in some contexts, but here I think Śrī Harṣa's opponent means something more provisional than knowledge in the sense of *pramā*. Hence, "cognition" is better choice to mean something more like having a provisional notion that might allow one to make use of the means of knowledge within a debate.

19. *tatra kiṃ sattvāvagamamātrāt sattvābhyupagamyeti manyase? abādhitāt tad avagamād vā?* (KhKh, p. 21).

20. *na tāvad ādhyaḥ, marūmarīcikādau jalarūpatāsadbhāvābhyupagamaprasaṅgāt* (KhKh, p. 21).

21. *yatra sarvaprakārair bādhitavyaṃ nāsti tat sadityabdhupagantavyam* (KhKh, p. 21).

22. See, for instance, *Nyāya Sūtra* 2.1.19–20, where a looming infinite regress urged by the (presumably Madhyamaka) skeptic is rejected by an appeal to the mutual certification of *pramāṇas* as well as an appeal to ending a regress as a matter of everyday practice. See section 6.1 for more on Nyāya as well as the Mīmāṃsā understanding of intrinsic validity.

23. *vyāvahārikīṃ pramāṇadisattvāmādāya vicāraārambhaḥ iti* (KhKh, p. 22).

24. *na ca vācyam antatas tadavagamasyāpi sattābyupeyeti/ tasyāpi sattācintyāyāṃ tatsattāvagamāntarasthaiva śaraṇatvāt/* (KhKh, p. 23).

25. Jha identifies this as a rule from Kumārila's *Ślokavarttika* 2.61 (Jha 1986, 13). This raises the possibility that Śrī Harṣa is addressing Mīmāṃsākas as well, although it may be that his only reason for mentioning this rule is that it functions well in everyday life.

26. *paramanusaraṇaramaṇīyenaiva ca samayaṃ baddhvā kathāyāṃ mithaḥ sampratipattyā pravartanāt /* (KhKh, p. 23).

27. *evameva asattvāviśeṣepi jñānamevāsad vyavahārovapādakaṃ nānyat /* (KhKh, p. 25). Note: There is a mistake in the manuscript as the second to last compound should read "*vyavahāropapādakaṃ*."

28. This seems to be the reading favored by Granoff and Jha (Granoff 1978, 88; Jha 1986, 14).

29. The text goes on to explore whether non-existent things can have causal efficacy in general, but this is where the *prasaṅga* argument concerning debate and the means of knowledge comes to an end.

30. See Ram-Prasad (2002, 138–139), for more on how the concept of *sattā* differs from deflationary views of truth such as Quine's.

31. For more detailed characterizations of *sattā*, see Ram-Prasad (2002, 136–138, 162–164).

32. This is not to say that other schools were not present in the later centuries of the classical period; Jains, Mīmāṃsākas, Dvaitins, and so forth were still active, although perhaps not as influential outside of their own schools.

33. Ram-Prasad (2002) and Phillips (1995) have been helpful in my understanding of these arguments.

34. The (provisional) acceptance of the reality of everyday experience is also what sets apart Advaita from Yogācāra idealism (Chakrabarti 1992).

35. *svaviśiṣṭe svavṛttir aṃśataḥ svāśrayatvam āpādayati /* (KhKh, p. 29).

36. *svasmin svavṛttivyatirekavat svaviśiṣṭe svavṛttivyatirekaniyamadarśanāt na saiva sattā tasminn iti* (*KhKh, p. 29*).

37. This rule is explained in slightly more depth by both Ram-Prasad (2002, 172) and Granoff (1978, 95).

38. Śrī Harṣa goes on to point out that if one were to add another qualifier to qualify *sattā*, then an infinite regress ensues. And if one were to admit an infinite series of separate existences, then the idea that *sattā* is a universal (*jāti*) would cease to be coherent (see KhKh, p. 30–31; Jha 1986, 17–18; Granoff 1978, 94).

39. For instance, I translate the *tattva* in Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (*Lion of the Destruction of Principles*) as "principles."

40. My understanding of this argument has benefitted greatly from consulting Phillips (1995, 164–173).

41. *'tattvānubhūtiḥ pramā'—ity apy ayuktaṃ, tattvaśabārthasya nivaktum aśakyatvāt / tasya bhāvo hi tattvam ucyate, prakṛtaṃ ca tacchabdārthaḥ, nacātra prakṛtaṃ kiñcid asti yat tacchabdena parāmṛśyate /* (KhKh, p. 130). Phillips identifies the definition under examination as coming from Udayana's *Lakṣaṇamālā* (Phillips 1995, 165).

42. For more on Nyāya theories of meaning, see NS 2.2.55–69, Phillips (1995, 38), and Dasti and Phillips (2017, Ch. 7).

43. *arajatāder api rajatādyātmanā anubhūtiviṣayatāsambhavād asatyānubhūtyavyavacchedāt /* (KhKh, p. 130).

44. Later Śrī Harṣa argues that the idea that the content of cognition is similar to an object makes no sense, because an illusory cognition is always similar to an object in being knowable (at least on the realist's theory) but it can never be similar in other ways, for instance, color can inhere in a physical object like a pot, but not in a mental object like a cognition (KhKh, p. 218; Phillips 1995, 168).

45. *bhavitur atattvaśabdārthatvaprasaṅgena dharmyaṃśe viśiṣṭe ca pramāyā apramātvāpātāt /* (KhKh, p. 131).

46. A similar view of Śrī Harṣa's attitude with regard to the limits of philosophical reasoning has been noted by others in recent scholarship (e.g., Timalsina 2016; Ganeri 2016; Granoff 2016; Maharaj 2014). While I have learned from each of these scholars and Ganeri agrees with me that Śrī Harṣa's target is "philosophy itself" insofar as philosophy rests on the articulation of definitions (Ganeri 2016, 16), none of these scholars place Śrī Harṣa in the context of a larger tradition of skepticism about philosophy.

47. Timalsina (2016) also sees this as a kind of indeterminacy, while Granoff (2016) has more recently claimed that Śrī Harṣa does not accept indeterminacy.

48. If he were, he may not be the first in the Indian tradition. As I have argued elsewhere (Mills 2016b), Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses* can read as having a number of affinities with modern external-world skepticism, especially if the text is read as phenomenalist rather than idealist.

49. Phillips (1995) contains valuable work on the philosophical relationship between Gaṅgeśa and Śrī Harṣa. Gaṅgeśa is often seen as the figure whose work marks the beginning of the medieval period of Indian philosophy (as in the periodization provided in Perrett 2016), so it could also be said that Śrī Harṣa played an important role in the transition from the classical to the medieval periods of Indian philosophy.

Conclusion

The History of Indian Skepticism and Mitigated Skepticism about Philosophy

Much like the history of Indian philosophy itself, the argument of this book has taken a complex trajectory with surprising detours and unlikely connections. While each of the three pillars—Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa—provides his own unique form of skepticism about philosophy with developments from differing strands of early Indian philosophy, I have been arguing that each pillar supports the first part of thesis of this book: the classical Indian philosophical tradition contains a tradition of skepticism about philosophy.

In the introduction of this book I articulated a cross-cultural concept of skepticism about philosophy as a therapeutic attitude and how it differs from modern epistemological skepticism as an epistemological theory or truth-claim. In chapter 1, I gave a tour of the beginnings of skepticism about philosophy in the early Indian tradition, particularly in the Ṛg *Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, and early Buddhist texts. In the remaining chapters I argued that Nāgārjuna was developing early Buddhist quietism, Jayarāśi took up materialism and Sañjayan skepticism, Śrī Harṣa expanded *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism, and each of these philosophers was himself also a pillar of a distinctively Indian form of skepticism about philosophy that developed during the classical period, Śrī Harṣa perhaps consciously so.

The task of his book has been mainly one of interpretation. Given my comments in the introduction about expanding the history of philosophy, particularly on the value of finding contemporary relevance within the history of philosophy, it is also worthwhile to consider what we might learn from the classical Indian tradition of skepticism about philosophy. This will be the focus of my concluding remarks. That is, I will make clear how the argument of this book supports the second part of my thesis: understanding this tradition ought to be an important part of our metaphilosophical reflections on the purposes and limits of philosophy today.

This will be the most speculative part of the book. Among the lessons that the three pillars of skepticism in classical India help to teach us is that we ought to have modesty about our philosophical abilities. I ask readers to give me the benefit of this sort of modesty about my claims here. My attitude toward my own conjectures is similar to an attitude expressed by Hume in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. Concerning the objection that his skepticism precludes him from making any philosophical claims, Hume says,

> I here enter a *caveat* against any objections, which may be offer'd on that head; and declare that such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other. (*Treatise* 1.4.7)

Reflecting on the Argument of This Book: Whither Philosophy?

Given that I am claiming we might learn valuable philosophical lessons from the types of skeptics about philosophy I have considered in this book, a number of philosophical questions arise. Are the three pillars in some sense *right* about the fate of philosophy? Is there any good that comes out of continuing philosophical inquiry? Or are the three pillars simply wrong? Can philosophers block their dismissive moves?

One might object, furthermore, that if the three pillars are skeptics about philosophy in the way that I am claiming, then the fact that they wrote books of philosophy makes no sense. Indeed, if I admit to agreeing with the pillars, one might wonder how the present book could have been produced. If one is convinced by skepticism about philosophy, why not simply do something else?

B. K. Matilal considers a similar objection with regard to mystical philosophers (of which he takes Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa to be representative):

> First, the logical arguments are useful, for they illuminate the mystical instead of deepening its mystery. In fact, the logical is indispensible. . . . You can kick the ladder away only when you have climbed up the wall, not before. . . . Second, the human mind is an incurably restless organ. . . . We have to reckon with the force of the rational component of the human mind. (Matilal

1977, 24)

Although I disagree with Matilal's mystical characterization of Nāgārjuna (for reasons discussed in chapter 2), I think his remarks can be adapted for skeptics about philosophy, whether they are, like Śrī Harṣa, also mystics. While some people can apparently "turn off their brains" at will and stop thinking, for another type of person—the type who tend to engage in philosophy—this is simply not an option. For this second type of person, mental peace is only achievable by *going through* philosophical issues and dissolving them from the inside—to use Candrakīrti's metaphor, such people require a drug that purges itself along with everything else (PP, p. 208–9).

For my own part, I admit that studying the three pillars has made me a great deal more circumspect about philosophy, at least as typically conceived. As I will argue later, however, my own skepticism about philosophy is mitigated by at least three positive uses of philosophy. I also think skepticism about philosophy ought to inform not just abstract intra-discipline metaphilosophical debates about the goals and nature of philosophy, but also our excursions into public philosophy of the philosophy to public direction of fit (Vaidya 2015).

In recent years several celebrity scientists such as Stephen Hawking, Lawrence Krauss, and Neil deGrasse Tyson have publicly denigrated philosophy as useless insofar as philosophy produces little if any input into our contemporary understanding of the universe.[1] I see the mistake of these scientists not so much in what they say (they have a point—we should be skeptical about philosophy given its three thousand year track record), but in the assumption that philosophy is or ought to be a quasi-scientific enterprise of generating testable truth-claims about the universe. In other words, these scientists have made a category mistake; it would be like criticizing cricket players for not adhering to the rules of basketball—they are simply playing a different game.[2] That the history of skepticism about philosophy can encourage us to articulate other uses for philosophy beyond the quasi-scientific is perhaps its greatest potential contemporary benefit, a point to which I shall return after saying a bit more about what I think philosophers ought to learn from the history of skepticism about philosophy.

Skepticism about Philosophy as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon

In addition to the Indian examples of skepticism about philosophy that have been my focus in this book, in the introduction I discussed some

examples of skepticism about philosophy in Western traditions (particularly Hellenistic skepticism) as well as Chinese and Abrahamic traditions. If I'm right, this means that forms of skepticism about philosophy have arisen in multiple philosophical traditions. Let me briefly consider two of these examples: the classical Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (c. 300 BCE) and the medieval Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE).

Consider the many playful attacks in the *Zhuangzi* on the types of language and conceptualization encouraged by philosophical activity, such as one of my favorite passages:

> A fish trap is there for the fish. When you have got hold of the fish, you forget the trap. A snare is there for the rabbits. When you have got hold of the rabbit, you forget the snare. Words are there for the intent. When you have got hold of the intent, you forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words, so I can have a few words with him? (*Zhuangzi*, Ch. 26, trans. Ziporyn 2009, 114)

Support for my interpretation comes from Paul Kjellberg (1996) and James Peterman (2008).[3] Kjellberg offers an illuminating comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus, showing that Zhuangzi uses arguments that are similar to the Pyrrhonian modes of relativity, circularity, infinite regress, and hypothesis in order to create uncertainty in his readers (Kjellberg 1996, 9). Nonetheless, "while both Sextus and Zhuangzi administer skeptical arguments to induce uncertainty, they do so for different reasons: Sextus for the psychological good of *ataraxia* and Zhuangzi for the practical good of what we shall call 'skillful living'" (Kjellberg 1996, 12–13). While Peterman denies that Zhuangzi is a skeptic, he means that Zhuangzi does not deny knowledge claims in general, as would a global epistemological skeptic.[4] Peterman claims that Zhuangzi can be interpreted along Wittgensteinian therapeutic lines in which Zhuangzi's text "scrupulously avoids and rejects making any philosophical claims" (Peterman 2008, 372). While developing a thorough, textually sensitive interpretation of Zhuangzi as a skeptic about philosophy is beyond my expertise, I suggest that it might be a profitable line of inquiry for scholars of Chinese philosophy.[5]

In contemporary scholarship the question of Al-Ghazali's relationship with skepticism tends to be discussed in terms of comparisons with Cartesian methodological skepticism in his *Deliverance from Error* or with Hume's skepticism about causation in his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*.[6] I'd like to suggest that he might instead be seen as a skeptic about philosophy given his

trenchant criticisms of philosophers, particularly of Islamic philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina who were heavily inspired by Aristotle. Al-Ghazali is also of course a mystic, as I discussed in chapter 2 as a contrast with Nāgārjuna. For him, "'ecstasy' ('hāl')" is a condition for a state of mystical knowledge (Al-Ghazali no date, 18); this condition that cannot be fully described in sensory or rational concepts any more than a drunken person can explicate the scientific definition of drunkenness (Al-Ghazali no date, 43–44). Al-Ghazali might be favorably compared to *Upaniṣadic* mystical skepticism or Śrī Harṣa in that he doesn't think one can provide philosophical arguments in favor of mystical experience of the prophet; according to Anthony Robert Booth, "al-Ghazali . . . is not seeking to *prove* that there is such a thing as genuine prophecy, or proving that it is necessary. Rather, he is merely stating the conditions under which he thinks prophecy is possible" (Booth 2016, 32).7 Tamara Albertini has intriguingly compared Al-Ghazali's criticisms of theologians and philosophers to Plato's divided line in that both philosophers find the only real, complete knowledge to exist beyond our typical, limited perspectives, although Al-Ghazali is skeptical about reason as well (Albertini 2005, 2–5). I lack the expertise to make a complete interpretation based on the Arabic texts and I in no way claim to have made a complete interpretation of Al-Ghazali as a skeptic about philosophy here, but I suggest this could be a fruitful angle for Islamic philosophy specialists.

Skepticism about philosophy is a broad enough umbrella term to encompass such differences while pointing to interesting similarities. I suggest that Sextus, Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, Zhuangzi, Al-Ghazali, and other philosophers could possibly be categorized as skeptics about philosophy, since they all share enough of the family resemblance features outlined in the introduction. But we don't need to use one particular figure, whether that be Sextus, Jayarāśi, or another philosopher, as the single standard by which to measure the others. It's more profitable to create a new larger category under which to subsume these diverse figures rather than seeking to subsume them under previously existing categories with specific historical associations. And when we notice this larger category, we find that skepticism about philosophy may be a widely cross-cultural phenomenon.

Memes, Mysteries, and the Limits of Thought

If I am right that skepticism about philosophy is a widely cross-cultural phenomenon, what might explain this fact? Why does this

type of skepticism seem to arise in so many time periods and cultural contexts?

Surprisingly, similar questions have been considered not just by contemporary philosophers, but also by psychologists, biologists, linguists, and cognitive scientists. Here I'll explore contemporary work that sheds some light on what the history of skepticism about philosophy might teach us: Susan Blackmore on memes, Graham Priest on the limits of thought, and Steven Pinker and Noam Chomsky on cognitive closure.

What are the conditions that make skepticism about philosophy possible? I think of this question in the context of the Buddhist idea of dependent origination: "When this arises, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases."[8] My idea is that whenever the conditions are right, whenever an intellectual tradition attempts to ground its claims in some deeper philosophical sense, there will often arise a small handful of individuals who question this very process, who develop a practice of demonstrating how the impulse to philosophize can be used against the philosophical enterprise itself. Within the Indian tradition I am not claiming that the three pillars—Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa—are the *only* moments of such questioning in this tradition. There were, as I hope to have shown in chapter 1, similar moments in early Indian philosophy, and there may well have been similar moments later.[9] Nonetheless, I think the three pillars are some of the clearest examples of this attitude for which we have textual evidence both within the Indian tradition and among all the world's philosophical traditions.

I should make it absolutely clear that I am in no way saying that skeptics such as Sextus, Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, or Śrī Harṣa were consciously aware of these conditions or that they would care to give a theoretical picture of these conditions. In this section, I am developing an explanatory thesis about the history of philosophy, which I think in turn helps to paint a provisional, metaphilosophical picture of the human condition.

I propose to use the idea of memes to explain how skepticism about philosophy might arise. A meme-based approach can tell us three things: how similar ideas arise in multiple traditions without positing direct historical influence, how skepticism about philosophy arises out of philosophical activity, and why skepticism about philosophy, while persistent, is generally unpopular.

Biologist Richard Dawkins first introduced the word "meme" in 1976 when he suggested that there are cultural replicators called memes that account for cultural transmission and evolution (Dawkins 2006). Memes include "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. … Just as genes propagate

themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins 2006, 192). Psychologist Susan Blackmore argues that memes fit the three criteria of a successful replicator: fidelity, fecundity, and longevity (Blackmore 1999, 100). She argues that it was meme-gene coevolution that gave humans the "big brains" and language abilities necessary for memes to be successful replicators (Blackmore 1999, 100–107).

Dawkins has applied memes to scientific activities (Dawkins 2006, 192). I suggest we apply the idea to philosophy. We can take things like definitions, arguments, quotations, and ideas as memes that can be replicated from one philosopher's brain to another. Schools of philosophy such as Nyāya might constitute "memeplexes" (Blackmore 1999, 231).[10] It is only public philosophical activities that are capable of being passed on as memes (Blackmore 1999, 15); however, the fact that many of our thoughts can and do become memes may account for the constant stream of thoughts most of us experience as a competition among prospective memes. Hence, it may be memetic competition that creates the mental disturbance that skeptics about philosophy seek to overcome: "With all this competition going on the main causality is a peaceful mind" (Blackmore 1999, 42).

The first advantage of a meme-based approach to philosophy is that it can explain how similar activity can arise in multiple traditions, even without direct contact between philosophers.[11] In convergent evolution similar biological adaptations evolve independently given similar environmental pressures. Likewise, similar philosophical ideas can arise independently given similar memetic environments. In a famous case of convergent evolution, the eye evolved in several distinct phylogenetic branches of life that are not directly related by common descent, at least not for many millions of years—all life is related if you go back far enough! Eyes are useful for organisms in a variety of environments; they are what Daniel Dennett calls a "Good Trick" (Dennett 1995, 77). Likewise, given the pressures of similar memetic environments, similar memes can arise even without direct descent, that is, without direct learning or imitation from other individuals. We may not want to say that such similar memes are strictly the *same* meme[12], but they are nonetheless similar memes just as the genes for squid eyes and those for human eyes are different genes although they produce similar biological structures.

The second advantage of a memetic view of philosophy is that it allows us to sketch a description of how skepticism about philosophy arises. The specific type of meme that often (although not always) gives rise to skepticism about philosophy might be called an ultimate

justification meme. This sort of meme arises from memeplexes in which issues of justification (or some other knowledge-certifying property[13]) take center stage. This happened in Greece, India, and elsewhere when philosophers turned from making creative speculations on the nature of reality to a concern with how it is that we know what we think we know. While this concern often became explicitly epistemological (e.g., Plato's *Theaetetus*, Gautama's *Nyāya Sūtra*, etc.), I'm referring more to a general concern for reasons, argument, and evidence used as justifications for one's views. Once this general concern is in place, it's only a matter of time before philosophers wonder what justification(s) could possibly justify their justifiers: hence, an ultimate justification is sought due to a natural memetic progression toward ultimate justification memes. Specific examples of ultimate justification memes are everything from Plato's Form of the Good to Dignāga's conceptionless perception.[14] Once ultimate justification memes are on the scene there are sometimes some philosophers who notice flaws in the idea of an ultimate justification, often in the form of self-referential paradoxes; they then use the sorts of arguments found in philosophical memeplexes against the idea of philosophy itself. Hence, skepticism about philosophy arises.

A third advantage of a memetic metaphilosophy is that it can explain why it is that skepticism about philosophy is so persistent yet never popular. This explanation begins with one of Blackmore's more controversial forays into memetics: "The self is a vast memeplex—perhaps the most insidious and pervasive memeplex of them all. I shall call it the 'selfplex'" (Blackmore 1999, 231). She notes that her theory resonates with Humean and Buddhist views of the self (Blackmore 1999, 226, 230–231). She says that her theory "suggests that memes can gain an advantage by becoming associated with a person's self concept. … Ideas that can be inside a self—that is, become 'my' ideas, or 'my' opinions, are winners" (Blackmore 1999, 232). People often engage in philosophy because they perceive that reaching the goals of philosophy—whatever they take those to be—is possible and desirable. Hence, this idea becomes associated with the self-concepts of philosophers. *I* spend time on an activity that has value to *me*. From this it follows that skepticism about philosophy would—for most philosophers anyway—serve to undermine their self-concepts. Therefore, memes for skepticism about philosophy will replicate less frequently among philosophers. Think of the success of the idea of Plato's Philosopher who communes with the Forms or the soteriological gains many Indian philosophers allege will be yours if you study their system. This isn't to say that more modest images, such as Locke's under laborer, don't also get passed on; it's not even to

say that skeptics couldn't identify with their skepticism—Jayarāśi might, for instance, firmly identify with his role as philosophical demolition expert. My point is that skepticism about philosophy tends to undermine the self-concepts of philosophers, which in turn will tend to make skepticism about philosophy unpopular.[15]

How is it that skepticism about philosophy is nonetheless so persistent as a cross-cultural phenomenon? While memes can be passed on for many reasons—appealing to the self-concept, being catchy, being easy to remember, etc.—some memes are passed on because they are true or have good reasons in their favor (Blackmore 1999, 180). My hypothesis is that there are good reasons to take up skepticism about philosophy. Some philosophers in the last few thousand years have noticed these reasons, although the uses to which they have put these discoveries have varied.

Whether the reader agrees with my interpretation of the three pillars as skeptics about philosophy, the crucial role of contradiction in their philosophical procedures is undeniable. Demonstrating contradictions in opponents' views is the basis of the *prasaṅga* method. Sextus's use of contradiction is not always as clear, but the method of *isostheneia*, or finding equally convincing arguments both for and against a position, shows that contradiction also underlies Pyrrhonian methods. Uncovering contradictions is not the only tool in a skeptic's bag of tricks, but it is one of the most effective: the idea is to lead opponents into skepticism by showing them that their views lead to intolerable contradictions.

Graham Priest is a contemporary specialist in philosophical logic who has thought deeply about contradictions and their place in philosophical thinking. His book *Beyond the Limits of Thought* is a dialethic adventure in the history of Western philosophy (with one stop in Indian philosophy in the second edition with the help of Jay Garfield). Priest presents this history as evidence for a logical theory known as dialetheism, "the view that there are true contradictions" (Priest 2002, 4). After looking at what Priest calls the Inclosure Schema, a schema for generating contradictions, I'll show how Priest and Garfield apply it to Nāgārjuna's work, and I will show how I think it applies to one argument from Jayarāśi's and another from Śrī Harṣa. I don't agree with Priest that dialetheism is the best explanation for the historical persistence of philosophical contradictions, but I do think that his Inclosure Schema captures the structure that some skeptics about philosophy have exploited over the centuries.

Priest claims that contradictions can be found in Aristotle, Sextus, modern set theory, Derrida, and many others, most especially Kant and Hegel. Priest's historical explorations are not always detailed (nor always convincing—his treatment of Sextus is particularly flawed[16]),

but as he says, “My interest throughout is in the substantial thesis concerning the dialethic nature of the limits of thought; the historical material is a vehicle for this” (Priest 2002, 6).

Priest identifies a schema for how these contradictions are generated. Such contradictions arise at the “limits of thought” when philosophers try to make statements about a domain that are simultaneously outside this domain (what Priest calls “Transcendence”) and a part of this domain (what Priest calls “Closure”). Because these statements are both inside and outside the domain, contradictions arise. Philosophical thinking, perhaps more so than any other human intellectual endeavor, is especially self-referential as it encourages us to think about thinking, that is, to reflect on the very activity in which we are engaged while we are engaged in it. Much of the difficulty of philosophy might be said to be due to the fact that you are trying to think *about* the concepts you usually think *with*. As Priest claims, “In general, the arguments both for Closure and Transcendence use some form of self-reference, a method that is both venerable and powerful. Closure is usually established by reflecting on the conceptual practice in question” (Priest 2002, 4).

Priest represents such Inclosure formally as an Inclosure Schema (Priest 2002, 156).

Priest’s Inclosure Schema

(1) $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ exists and $\psi(\Omega)$ Existence
(2) if $x \subseteq \Omega$ and $\psi(x)$ (a) $\delta(x) \notin x$ Transcendence
(b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$ Closure

This formal schema captures formal paradoxes in set theory, such as the Burali-Forti Paradox and Russell’s Paradox, but Priest thinks it also applies to other less formal contradictions, such as the Liar Paradox and Kant’s Antinomies (Priest 2002, Chs. 8 and 9). Consider Russell’s Paradox, according to which the set of all sets that are not members of themselves (i.e., the Russell Set, here represented by Ω) both is and is not a member of itself. More informally spelled out, φ(y) means that y is a member of the set of all sets that do not contain themselves and the function δ(x) is creating a power set. The contradiction arises because performing this function creates a set that both *is* a member of itself and thus is not a member of the set of the set of all sets that are *not* members of themselves, as in condition (2a) above, and is *not* a member of itself and thus *is* a member of the set of all sets that are members of themselves, as in condition (2b) above.[17]

Note that applying the Inclosure Schema to Russell's Paradox only requires one property, φ, whereas other Inclosures require a second property, represented by ψ.

Priest, together with Jay Garfield, also applies to Inclosure Schema to Nāgārjuna. According to Garfield and Priest (2002)[18], there are two major paradoxes that fit the Inclosure Schema in Nāgārjuna's work: a paradox of expressibility and a paradox of ontology. I will set aside the paradox of expressibility here.[19]

The paradox of ontology underlies Nāgārjuna's step from phase one to phase two. Garfield and Priest describe it as follows: "All phenomena, Nāgārjuna argues, are empty and so ultimately have no nature. But emptiness is, therefore, the ultimate nature of things. So they both have and lack an ultimate nature" (Garfield and Priest 2002, 103). Garfield and Priest apply the Inclosure Schema to this paradox as follows:

> Ω is the set of things that have the nature of being empty. Now assume that X⊆Ω and ψ(X), that is, that X is a set of things with some common nature. δ(X) is that nature, and δ(X)∈Ω, since all things are empty (Closure). It follows from this that δ(X) has no nature. Hence, δ(X)∈Ω, since X is a set of things with some nature (Transcendence). The limit contradiction is that the nature of all things (Ω)—viz. emptiness—both is and is not empty. (Garfield and Priest 2002, 104)

This spells out, much more formally than I did in chapter 2, the contradiction implied by MMK 27.29–30 that drives the progression from phase one, in which Nāgārjuna argues *for* emptiness as a provisional philosophical view, and phase two, in which Nāgārjuna describes the relinquishment of all views. Thus, I agree with Garfield and Priest that Nāgārjuna's work does contain this contradiction, but I disagree with them that if Nāgārjuna had had an explicitly stated logical theory then it would have been dialetheism (Garfield and Priest 2002, 87–88). Nāgārjuna intends his readers to respond to this contradiction as an incitement to abandon all views, just as he says.

The Inclosure Schema can also apply to at least one of Jayarāśi's arguments. In chapter 5 (section 5.4) I discussed what I called The Impossibility of Considering Duality Argument. This argument begins with Dignāga's strict dualism of *pramāṇas*: perception (*pratyakṣa*) can only apprehend itself, but not inference (*anumāna*), and *vice versa*. Jayarāśi points out that this means that perception and inference could never both be the object of one and the same cognition. Since this is not possible, the statement that there are only two *pramāṇas* can't—if Dignāga's presuppositions are correct—be justified by a

pramāṇa. Since the fact of there being two *pramāṇas* can't be justified, "Thus, talking or thinking about the number [of *pramāṇas*] being two is impossible" (TUS 3.3a).[20]

Here's how I think the argument fits the Inclosure Schema.

Ω = set of things justified by a *pramāṇa*
φ(y) = y is a thing justified by a *pramāṇa*

ψ(Ω) = the set of things justified by a *pramāṇa* (Ω) is either justified by *pratyakṣa* or *anumāna*, but not both (ψ)

δ(x) = "there are only two *pramāṇas*"

δ(x) ∉ x = "there are only two *pramāṇas*" is *not* a member of the set of things justified by a *pramāṇa* (Transcendence)

δ(x) ∈ Ω = "there are only two *pramāṇas*" *is* a member of the set of things justified by a *pramāṇa* (Closure)

The contradiction is that for Dignāga "there are only two *pramāṇas*" both *has to be* and *can't be* a member of the set of things justified by a *pramāṇa* (Ω). If Jayarāśi is right, Dignāga's epistemology contains a contradiction due to the combination of Closure and Transcendence. That is, the fact of there being two *pramāṇas has* to be justified by a *pramāṇa* if Dignāga's epistemology is right (Closure), but this fact *cannot* be justified by a *pramāṇa* according to Dignāga's own theory (Transcendence). Thus, Jayarāśi points to a limit contradiction inherent in Dignāga's epistemology.[21]

In chapter 7 (section 7.2) I discussed some of Śrī Harṣa's arguments against the Nyāya realist concept of existence (*sattā* or *tattva*), one of which I called the Indeterminate Meaning argument. This argument can be summarized as follows:

1. The word "*tattva*" is supposed to refer to the being of the intentional object (*viṣaya*) of cognition.
2. But this theory does not exclude the intentional objects of illusory cognitions (e.g., of mother-of-pearl as silver, etc.).
3. "*Tattva*" is supposed to be a property of all existing things.
4. But this theory has the unwanted consequence (*prasaṅga*) that "*tattva*" would have to refer to something other than the property-possessors (i.e., all existing things).
5. Therefore, "*tattva*" does not refer to existence as intended, which means that the meaning of "*tattva*" is difficult, if not impossible, to determine.

Here's how I apply the Inclosure Schema to this argument.

Ω = set of things referred to by "*tattva*"
$\varphi(y)$ = y is a thing referred to by "*tattva*"

$\psi(\Omega)$ = the set of things referred to by "*tattva*" (Ω) must be distinct from illusory cognitions and be a property separate from the property-possessors (ψ)

$\delta(x)$ = "this existing thing"

$\delta(x) \notin x$ = "this existing thing" is *not* a member of the set of things referred to by "*tattva*" (Transcendence)

$\delta(x) \in \Omega$ = "this existing thing" *is* a member of the set of things referred to by "*tattva*" (Closure)

The contradiction Śrī Harṣa uncovers in this argument is that the notion of existence (*tattva*) both *has to* refer to an existing thing (that is the Nyāya theory), but at the same time *it cannot* refer to an existing thing (because the theory can't rule out illusory cognitions and it violates the rule that a property and property-possessor must be different).

I hope to have shown that Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa add more evidence to Priest's claim that such contradictions are present at many moments in the history of philosophy. Supposing this is right, what should we make of it? Priest claims that dialetheism is the best explanation for the historical persistence of inclosure contradictions (Priest 2002, 227). He takes the contradictions to reveal something about the nature of reality (Priest 2002, 295).

Most philosophers today would agree that dialetheism is a hard pill to swallow. If anything, considerations of epistemic conservatism ought to give us pause. The principle of non-contradiction has served philosophers in multiple traditions perfectly well for thousands of years; it ought not to be discarded lightly. I'm not claiming that dialetheism is false, but rather that it is such a major shift in logical theory that it would perhaps be wise to search for alternative interpretations of the historical data. The Inclosure Schema picks out a genuine feature of philosophical thought, but we need not interpret these results as evidence for dialetheism. Perhaps these contradictions don't arise at the limits of reality itself, but rather at the limits of our cognitive abilities as human beings.

My inspiration for this alternative suggestion comes from a theory that has found support among some philosophers and scientists in recent decades. Cognitive closure is one name for the theory that some

questions are unanswerable, not in general for any rational being or at the level of reality itself, but rather for us given our cognitive limitations as evolved human creatures. One of the earliest proponents of this type of theory is Noam Chomsky, who for decades has been distinguishing between problems and mysteries: problems are issues that are within our cognitive capacities to resolve, while mysteries are not (e.g., Chomsky 1980, 6–7; 2016, 27). Within philosophy of mind there is a prominent version of cognitive closure typically known as mysterianism (or new mysterianism), which asserts that the resolution of the so-called "hard problem of consciousness" (that is, how first-personal mental states arise from purely natural physical processes) may remain beyond our cognitive grasp.[22] As a general view, cognitive closure is sometimes thought to apply to other philosophical issues such as knowledge (particularly with regard to epistemological skepticism), free will, meaning, personal identity, ethics, and so forth.

The psychologist Steven Pinker provides a helpful description of this broader version of cognitive closure.

> Maybe philosophical problems are hard not because they are divine or irreducible or meaningless or workaday science, but because the mind of *Homo sapiens* lacks the cognitive equipment to solve them. We are organisms, not angels, and our minds are organs, not pipelines to the truth. Our minds evolved by natural selection to solve problems that were life-and-death matters to our ancestors, not to commune with correctness or to answer any question we are capable of asking. We cannot hold ten thousand words in short-term memory. We cannot see ultraviolent light. We cannot mentally rotate an object in the fourth dimension. And perhaps we cannot solve conundrums like free will and sentience. (Pinker 2009, 561)[23]

It is worth noting that neither Pinker nor Chomsky see cognitive closure as a pessimistic or defeatist conclusion insofar as it merely prescribes probable limits on what we can know, but not an absolute prohibition on knowledge in general (Pinker 2009, 563; Chomsky 2016, 56–57).

Turning back to skeptics about philosophy such as the three pillars, then, we can see their activities as exploiting our cognitive limitations, of showing us where their opponents have attempted to step too far into areas that remain cognitively closed to human beings. In fact, the three pillars are perhaps a bit more honest than contemporary proponents of cognitive closure: if cognitive closure is true, then it would seem that specifying exactly the boundaries between that

which is open to us and that which is closed, between problems and mysteries, would become yet another mystery.

As Nicholas Rescher puts it, "detailed knowledge about the *extent* of our ignorance is unavailable to us. For what is at stake with this issue is the extent of the ratio of the manifold of what one does know to the manifold of what one does not. And it is impossible in the nature of things for me to get a clear fix on the latter" (Rescher 2006, 106). We could never specify the extent of things of which we are ignorant precisely because we are ignorant of those things. Perhaps too full an endorsement of cognitive closure leads to a Priest-style Inclosure Schema. It could have been self-reflexive reflections such as these that have prevented skeptics about philosophy throughout the centuries from developing a theory to account for the limits of philosophy—it is why they *demonstrated* rather than *theorized* such limits. It is also why my own attitude about cognitive closure is somewhat less than full endorsement—I see it more as a suspicion or a hypothesis than a belief per se.

I should stress again that I am in no way claiming that skeptics about philosophy such as Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa understood the conditions they exploited for their skeptical purposes or that they would be at all interested in developing the sort of theoretical explanation I'm developing here. My point is that it was perhaps something like the features involved in my explanation that allowed their skepticism to be used for the various purposes to which they put it.

An Argument for Mitigated Skepticism about Philosophy

Thinking about skepticism about philosophy has led me to what I call mitigated skepticism about philosophy. My argument in favor of this form of skepticism has three stages. First, a "pessimistic induction" should give rise to a skeptical attitude about philosophy. Second, while I am partially in agreement with Priest's contention about contradictions at the limits of thought as well as the theory of cognitive closure I think we should have a more properly skeptical attitude—while there is evidence that our philosophical abilities have limits, we can never be entirely sure about the nature of these limits. Third, I think this skepticism should be mitigated: philosophy can have *some*redeeming qualities, such as helping us develop intellectual imagination, cognitive capacities, and the warding off of reckless dogmatism.

Timothy Williamson discusses what could be called a pessimistic

induction[24] in favor of the conclusion that "no analysis of the concept *knows* of the standard kind is correct" (Williamson 2000, 30). I agree with Williamson, but I would apply such a pessimistic induction to most other philosophical goals as well. An honest assessment of the cross-cultural history of philosophy ought to give substantial evidence for a pessimistic induction about our prospects for philosophical progress. The history of philosophy, with its constant dialectic of the arising and passing way of philosophical proposals, should teach us to be cautious.[25] From where do we get the assurance that we alone have gotten ahold of the truth where countless others throughout history have failed?[26]

Granted, many philosophers make their careers claiming to have answered such questions. But the fact that other philosophers make *their* careers raising devastating objections against these claims should give us pause and prompt us to ask another question: Can we even imagine a philosophical view that would admit of no reasonable disagreement whatsoever? Are there any philosophical views that achieve the level of acceptance found in scientific theories such as evolution has found within biology? I leave it to readers to answer that question for themselves. For my part, I cannot imagine a philosophical view impervious to reasonable objections. This is not to say that no philosophical views are *true*. Some of them very well may be. My point is that the sociological fact of the persistence of objections should give us pause about whether we know whether any philosophical views are true or not. One might object that we can still have epistemic warrant for a view even if there are compelling objections to that view (i.e., in terms of contemporary epistemology of disagreement, one should be steadfast rather than conciliatory). In some cases, perhaps, one could take this stance, but in this case skepticism about philosophy has far greater evidence in its favor than dogmatism about philosophy: skepticism has, with the possible exception of basic logical principles, the entire history of philosophy in its favor.[27]

I readily admit that my conclusion itself admits of reasonable objections. However, this is a pessimistic *induction*; the conclusion could be false. For all I know, some philosophical question has been or will be answered to the satisfaction of all interested parties. However, until such a situation makes itself apparent, thereby overturning the evidence of thousands of years of philosophical speculation, my attitude will be that of skepticism. My attitude is similar to the probabilist interpretation of the Academic skeptic, Carneades. This interpretation allows Carneades to answer the inconsistency objection that Academic skepticism is a form of negative dogmatism in which the Academic *knows* that knowledge is impossible: "Carneades would

not need to assert that he knows knowledge is impossible; instead he may say this is a persuasive intellectual impression to which he assents with the proper measure of caution" (Thorsrud 2009, 80; see Cicero, *Academia* 2.99). My skepticism about philosophy rests on a similar intellectual impression.[28]

The second stage of my argument for skepticism about philosophy begins with the metaphilosophical predicament described in the previous section: there seem to be limits to our philosophical capacities, but knowledge of the precise nature of those limits eludes us for reasons we perhaps are not able to understand entirely. Priest's Inclosure Schema does capture the main type of problem that we find quite often in the history of philosophy, but whether these problems demonstrate dialetheism, cognitive closure, or some other theory is most likely something we could never know in much detail. We can know *that* there are limits to our philosophical capacities, but it seems unlikely that we'll ever completely understand *why* we have these limitations.

To argue support this claim, I'd like to make a distinction between shallow knowledge and deep knowledge. Shallow knowledge is what concerns most people—even most philosophers—most of their lives. Justification memes arise and the challenges are met. Shallow knowledge concerns what Chomsky would call problems, rather than mysteries; such knowledge rests on there being some propositions that are not doubted—what Wittgenstein calls "hinge propositions" or what Michael Williams calls "methodological necessities" (Wittgenstein 1969, § 343; Williams 1996, 123). I'm not calling this shallow to imply that it's trivial or silly; some of the most profound scientific knowledge of the day, from cosmology to evolution, is shallow knowledge in this sense. I mean only to distinguish it from deep knowledge. Whereas shallow knowledge is where we can touch bottom, so to speak, deep knowledge is where philosophers try to swim by pushing analyses further so that regular justification memes lead to ultimate justification memes, which in turn leads us to situations characterized by Priest's Inclosure Schema. When we try to touch bottom, we find ourselves feeling as Descartes describes beautifully in the opening paragraph of the Second Meditation: "It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top" (Descartes 1984, 16; AT VII 24).

My distinction between shallow and deep knowledge is somewhat similar to contextualist epistemologies in that I think there is something special about philosophical activities, but my model has to do with the depth of analysis rather than contexts of inquiry. Anything can turn philosophical. Normal justification memes lead to ultimate

justification memes. We swim into the depths of knowledge and find ourselves unable to touch bottom. But I see the shift of concern from shallow to deep knowledge as a process brought about by engaging in a deeper level of analysis, somewhat like many Abhidharma philosophers see the shift from conventional to ultimate truth. Unlike contextualists such as David Lewis (1999) or Stewart Cohen (2000), I don't think we need to see the same proposition (e.g., "S knows that p.") as true in one context and false in another. Rather, I'd say that the difference is between two different kinds of knowledge: we might have shallow knowledge that "S knows that p" while simultaneously lacking deep knowledge that "S knows that p." When we progress from shallow knowledge to deep knowledge, we are doing more than changing context, we are changing the subject. This view is closer to the issue contextualism of Michael Williams (1996; 2004). Contrary to Williams, however, I think this is a perfectly natural thing to do.[29] It would be far more unnatural if the processes of philosophical justification *didn't* turn on themselves once in a while given the memetic progression from normal to ultimate justification and the reflexive nature of philosophical thinking.

Granted, I am being deliberately impressionistic; I don't mean to present a fully articulated epistemological theory. To bring this back to my argument for skepticism about philosophy, the kind of knowledge that would constitute a full understanding of why philosophical answers are so elusive would itself be deep knowledge; this knowledge would be an ultimate justification for our ignorance. There may be explanations for our metaphilosophical predicament that I have failed to imagine, but it would seem that attempts to articulate any would-be deep knowledge of the explanation of our metaphilosophical predicament fall into a dilemma: we can give an explanation that in turn requires a hefty justification itself, or we can appeal to a theory that involves knowledge claims concerning that which is supposed to be unknowable. Deep knowledge is what philosophers are after.[30] And it is that that it seems we can never have. Thus, the proper attitude toward the pursuit of this sort of deep knowledge is skepticism: we find ourselves in this metaphilosophical predicament, but we seem to be unable to understand why we find ourselves there.

The third stage of my argument for skepticism about philosophy is to show that, despite the reasons given in the first two stages, I think there are reasons to mitigate this skepticism. I think there are three main benefits of engaging in philosophy: philosophy can be fun, it can develop cognitive capacities such as intellectual imagination and critical thinking skills, and it helps us avoid reckless dogmatism. I think skepticism about philosophy should be mitigated in the sense

that realizing its truth (or at least likelihood) shouldn't stop us from doing philosophy all together, although it should weaken the degree of confidence we place in our philosophical beliefs.

In section 12 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume distinguishes between two senses of mitigated (or Academic) skepticism. He opposes mitigated skepticism to what he sees as excessive Pyrrhonian skepticism (I think Hume is terribly unfair to Pyrrhonism, but that's beside the point here[31]). The first way skepticism can be mitigated is what Don Garrett calls a "limitation of *degree*" (Garrett 2004, 72). Hume's idea here is that the skeptical attitudes cultivated in abstract philosophizing can, to some extent, carry over into the more concrete realm of everyday thinking. Many people are quite dogmatic (a fact as true in our day as in Hume's), but Hume thinks skeptical philosophy might do some good.

> But could such dogmatic reasoners become sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state and when most accurate and cautious in its determinations, such a reflection would naturally inspire them with more modesty and reserve, and diminish their fond opinion of themselves and their prejudice against their antagonists. . . . if any of the learned are inclined, from their natural temper, to haughtiness and obstinancy, a small tincture of Pyrrhonism might abate their pride by showing them that the few advantages which they may have attained over their fellows are but inconsiderable, if compared with the universal perplexity and confusion which is inherent in human nature. (Hume *Enquiry* Sec. 12, Part 3).

The second kind of mitigation is what Garrett calls "a limitation of *domain*" (Garrett 2004, 72). Hume refers here to "the limitation of our inquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding" (Hume *Enquiry* Sec. 12, Part 3).

Hume says that these are both useful forms of mitigation, but given the first two steps in my argument for skepticism about philosophy, I find it difficult to separate the philosophical domains for which human understanding is adapted from those that it is not. We might think, for instance, that basic logical principles are beyond reproach, but Priest shows us, for instance, that even the principle of non-contradiction has its reasonable detractors. Hence, I prefer to concentrate on mitigation of degree.

The first reason skepticism about philosophy ought to be mitigated (as a limitation of degree) is summed up nicely by Fogelin: "Although doing philosophy can yield melancholy, sometimes—when the situation is right—it can also be fun" (Fogelin 2003, 165). Although

philosophy is a kind of fun that can't be appreciated by everyone to the same degree, this isn't a problem. I don't appreciate the fun people claim to have while running long distances, but I can still appreciate that some people find such activities pleasurable. I suspect that Jayarāśi had a great deal of fun composing the TUS, and Śrī Harṣa claims that the right kind of reader will experience joy from his arguments.[32] Being fun isn't of course a sufficient reason for engaging in an activity (the fact that a serial killer might think murder is fun doesn't condone murder), but insofar as philosophy is generally less harmful than dangerous drugs or activities that hurt other people it's not inherently any worse than playing chess or doing crossword puzzles, especially if a small tincture of skepticism about philosophy is added to the mix.

The second reason to mitigate skepticism about philosophy is that philosophy develops valuable cognitive capacities, especially intellectual imagination, intellectual empathy, and critical thinking skills. Contemplating difficult metaphysical systems such as those presented by Spinoza or Abhidharma philosophers can be fun, but it also serves to stretch the intellectual imagination far beyond where most everyday activities take it. If you can stretch your mind enough to make sense of Spinoza or Abhidharma, you may be more likely to imagine solutions to problems in more down-to-earth areas like engineering or politics. Doing so also cultivates intellectual empathy, or the ability to—momentarily at least—imagine inhabiting a radically different worldview than one's own. Such a skill can transfer nicely to our interactions with others in ethical and political realms. Philosophy is especially suited to developing critical thinking skills due to its reflexive nature. Rather than simply using good critical thinking skills without understanding them, the sort of thinking about thinking encouraged in philosophy can develop understanding of how and why principles of critical thinking apply.

The third reason to mitigate skepticism about philosophy is that philosophy can make us less dogmatic. Of course, philosophy can sometimes make people more dogmatic and more attached to their beliefs, and this is precisely the disease that skeptics about philosophy attempt to treat. But as Hume points out, a proper appreciation of skepticism can make us less dogmatic: "For Hume, doubts raised in the study can, though with diminished force, be carried out to the streets, where they can perform the useful service of moderating dogmatic commitments. In this way, skeptical doubts can be used to curb what Hume refers to as 'enthusiasm'—what we now call fanaticism" (Fogelin 2003, 167–168).

Given recent work in the epistemology of disagreement, some philosophers have recently wondered whether we ought to believe our

philosophical views; Zach Barnett (2017) argues that we can still rationally and sincerely believe our philosophical views if we set aside some of our evidence, namely, the evidence from disagreement.[33] While Barnett's view could lead to a deeper dogmatic commitment within this insulated state, it could be acknowledged that this belief might become less certain once the evidence of disagreement is incorporated, as skeptics like Zhuangzi and Sextus demonstrated thousands of years ago. This could be a way to have one's belief without suffering excessively from dogmatism.

Studying the three pillars themselves can serve to curb dogmatism. From Nāgārjuna we can learn that our philosophical dogmatisms can become sources of harmful attachment and deep suffering. From Jayarāśi we are encouraged to consider the ways in which philosophical dogmatisms might detract from our enjoyment of life, or perhaps more deeply we might consider what role philosophy ought to play in our lives. From Śrī Harṣa we are led to consider the thought that even given all the self-assured dogmatisms of philosophy and common sense, reality beyond our everyday experience could be vastly different than we think it is.

Political, economic, or religious dogmatisms often rest on taking some controversial philosophical thesis to be true. For instance, the attitude that free market forces always lead to economic efficiency (sometimes called "market fundamentalism") rests not on an empirical claim, but on a philosophical thesis. A proper modesty about controversial philosophical theses might temper such dogmatism.

All of this suggests that one of the reasons for the historical persistence of skepticism about philosophy is that there are reasons in favor of adopting it. I'm not, of course, claiming that skeptics such as the three pillars actually make any truth-claims on this topic. Neither my explanation for how skepticism about philosophy has arisen nor my own argument in favor of mitigated skepticism about philosophy requires that the skeptics I have covered here noticed or understood any of the features involved. Instead, I have attempted to articulate support for the second part of the thesis of this book: that we have much to learn from the three pillars today.

Expanding the History and Future of Philosophy

If the thesis of this book is correct, I've shown that the category of philosophical skepticism is broader and more diverse than most contemporary philosophers think. Versions of epistemological skepticism such as external-world skepticism, while perhaps the paradigm of skepticism in contemporary philosophy, constitute merely

one kind of skepticism. On my model, the arising of ultimate justification memes sets all this into motion, leading philosophers into inclosure situations and other philosophical mysteries that we are incapable of definitively solving. It seems to me that this is an entirely natural process for human beings engaged in philosophical activities; thus, it should not be surprising to find instances of skepticism about philosophy in multiple traditions and historical periods.

It is my hope that this book has demonstrated the importance of the history of philosophy and especially the necessity of expanding our histories to include multiple traditions. If we claim to believe that the history of philosophy enriches our present-day understandings of ourselves and our deepest interrogations of what it means to be human, then it is simply myopic madness to limit ourselves to the history of one geographical tradition. At its best philosophy is about expanding our intellectual horizons while at the same time problematizing those horizons. The cross-cultural history of philosophy has an important part to play in what philosophy can do for us, in cultivating critical thinking skills, tempering our impulses to dogmatism, and—perhaps this is far more important than we allow ourselves to think—having a little fun.

Of course, I am well aware that many readers will disagree with both my interpretations of the historical philosophers I've discussed as well as my argument in favor of mitigated skepticism about philosophy. On either count, some may think I've overlooked important alternatives be they anti-realism, historicism, anti-foundationalism, pragmatism, phenomenology, postmodernism, content externalism, deflationism, or any of the vast manner of contemporary theories that seek to defuse skepticisms of various kinds.

While these conversations are likely to continue for as long as there are human beings to have them, I can reply that beyond the arguments I have adduced here, much of my affinity for skepticism about philosophy stems from my attitude that I call—for lack of a better term—deep realism. I describe this attitude somewhat playfully as the suspicion that the universe doesn't owe us anything. Or to put it another way, the truth is out there (or not) whether we know it (or not). Although I don't share Thomas Nagel's view that truth is the primary goal of philosophy (see, for instance, my three reasons for mitigating skepticism about philosophy), I share his criticism of certain theories that seek to redefine the very idea of truth:

> If truth is our aim, we must be resigned to achieving it to a very limited extent, and without certainty. To redefine the aim so that its achievement is largely guaranteed, through various forms of

> reductionism, relativism, or historicism, is a form of cognitive wish-fulfillment. Philosophy cannot take refuge in reduced ambitions. It is after eternal and nonlocal truth, even though we know that is not what we are going to get. (Nagel 1986, 10)

I don't mean for this quotation to settle the matter, nor do I entirely agree with it; I'm fine with ambitions for philosophy outside of the pursuit of truth as long as such goals don't involve fixing the game so that we too easily know the truth. My point is that theoretical attempts to dismiss skepticism about philosophy cannot be easily established, and we shouldn't appeal to theories simply because they dissolve problems we may not like.

All of this has led me to suspect that skepticism about philosophy is more difficult to avoid than most philosophers would care to admit. It is probably not only a natural feature of human philosophical activity, but a feature that we are unlikely to overcome whether directly or by any sort of further philosophical diagnosis. We may have a great deal of what I call shallow knowledge, but deep knowledge is difficult, if not impossible, for human beings to possess. To put things more colloquially, we *kind of* know lots of things, but we don't *really* know much of anything. Normally human epistemic processes get along just fine, but when philosophers push the level of analysis deeper with ultimate justification memes, we no longer touch bottom. We tumble dizzyingly into philosophical confusions.

Is this a bleak and depressing situation? Earlier I mentioned celebrity scientists who have claimed that philosophy is useless because it offers no answers. Am I acquiescing to this view? I take heart from the fact that not all scientists agree. The physicist Marcelo Gleiser, who is sympathetic to philosophy, agrees with Chomsky and Pinker that it is good for us that science is continually brushing up against the borders between ignorance and knowledge. Gleiser employs a metaphor of the Island of Knowledge: "As the Island of Knowledge grows, so do the shores of our ignorance—the boundary between the known and the unknown. . . . The more we know, the more exposed we are to our ignorance" (Gleiser 2014, xxii).

While some scientists painstakingly expand small parts of the Island of Knowledge while standing firmly on its shores, philosophers (as well as philosophical scientists, artists, and others) work on rockier parts of the shore as they try to swim beyond where they can touch bottom—and are swept back by the tides of ignorance. This is often a dizzying experience. It can sometimes be a painful one. But, as I've argued, it may also have its uses. If we are lucky, it might even be fun.

Skeptics like Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi, and Śrī Harṣa can keep us humble lest we become too smug about our philosophical

speculations. But I remain hopeful that philosophy can have other useful tasks. As Bertrand Russell states,

> Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation (Russell 1959, 161)

Even the most radical skeptics about philosophy need philosophy to jettison philosophy from their lives. And the rest of us can learn that in the end our most cherished theories may not pan out; our self-assured certainties may ultimately be nothing but the best guesses we have. We philosophers are after all *lovers* of wisdom and not *possessors* of it; we may have views (*darśana*) but can never fully establish (*sidhyati*) them. By all means we should continue to push philosophy as far as it will go. But not *too far*.

NOTES

1. For more on these comments and the ensuing controversies, see Healey (2017), Jogalekar (2014), and Pigliucci (2014). In the interest of fairness and because I admire his work as a science popularizer, I should note that Tyson later qualified his position so that he was not dismissing philosophy completely.

2. The fact that these remarks were widely reported perhaps evinces a deep form of scientism within our contemporary culture. It is hard to imagine say, a literature professor with no scientific training who denigrated physics being taken seriously at all, whereas celebrity scientists' remarks about a discipline in which they have little or no training were widely publicized as something worth serious consideration.

3. For more on Zhuangzi and skepticism, see also Kjellberg and Ivanhoe (1996, Chs. 2–4).

4. For instance, the famous butterfly dream in chapter two might seem to be an expression of epistemological skepticism. However, it is more likely that this is meant to demonstrate what Zhuangzi calls "the Transformation of Things." As Kjellberg notes, "His worry about knowledge is not that it is radically illusory so much as that it is partial and incomplete" (Kjellberg 1996, 13).

5. It might be thought that Zhuangzi is, rather than a skeptic, a sort of mystic. As Kjellberg says, "In spite of Zhuangzi's skepticism concerning linguistic or 'rational' knowledge, he has absolute faith in intuitive or 'natural' knowledge" (Kjellberg 1996, 15). However, Zhuangzi is still using philosophical arguments to undermine philosophy; furthermore, this "natural knowledge" is more of a way of acting in the world than anything resembling mystical knowledge in a Jamesian

sense.

6. See Al-Ghazali (no date) and (2000). For examples of modern scholarship on Al-Ghazali and skepticism, see Albertini (2005), Halevi (2002), and Zamir (2010). Heck (2014) is a more general treatment of skepticism in Islamic philosophy.

7. Note that Booth's context is his interpretation of Al-Ghazali as a "moderate anti-evidentialist" in the ethics of belief; that is, he thinks we are justified in having at least some beliefs in the absence of epistemic reasons, which is in opposition to the moderate evidentialism of Al-Farabi.

8. There is also a more complex twelve-step formulation of dependent origination (e.g., SN 12.1). See Gethin (1998, 149–159).

9. Other possible expressions of skepticism about philosophy in the Indian tradition might be Dignāga's rather sparse epistemology (at least given readings such as that of Hayes 1988) or perhaps Vasubandhu's intellectually modest stance at the end of his *Twenty Verses* (see Mills 2016b).

10. Religious traditions are the most typical examples of memeplexes (Dawkins 2006, 197–198; Blackmore 1999, Ch. 15; Dennett 2006).

11. I continue to suspend judgment about whether there in fact was historical transmission of skeptical practices between India and Greece (see the Introduction for my caveat on this matter). My point is merely that such hypotheses are not strictly necessary to explain the existence of skepticism about philosophy in multiple traditions.

12. Dennett claims, "We do not want to consider two *identical* cultural items as instances of the same *meme* unless they are related by descent. (The genes for octopus eyes are not the same genes as those for dolphin eyes, however similar they may appear.) This is apt to create a host of illusions, or just undecidability, for cultural evolutionists wherever they attempt to trace the memes for Good Tricks. The more abstract the level at which we identify the memes, the harder it is to tell convergent evolution from descent" (Dennett 1995, 356). Blackmore is more optimistic about the prospects for more exact memetics in the future (Blackmore 1999, 58).

13. Examples of other possible knowledge-certifying properties include having the right causal conditions (as in Nyāya epistemology—see Phillips 2012—and Goldman 1985) or that beliefs "track the truth" (as in Nozick 1981, Ch. 3).

14. Anti-realists and anti-foundationalists might claim that my account is unnecessarily realist or foundationalist in character. My reply is that ultimate justification memes still come up when one wonders what justifies anti-realism or anti-foundationalism—ultimate justification memes are harder to avoid than many contemporary philosophers realize.

15. Furthermore, Blackmore's theory augments my argument that Nāgārjuna had Buddhist motivations for his skepticism. As Blackmore says, "An interesting consequence of all this is that beliefs, opinions, possessions and personal preferences all bolster the idea that there is a believer or owner behind them" (Blackmore 1999, 233). One way to lessen one's attachment to an illusory self-concept is to reduce one's beliefs and opinions. And as I see it this is just what Nāgārjuna was trying to do.

16. See Priest (2002, 41–48). The first problem is that Priest takes Sextus to have a single argument for skepticism. Second, Priest seems to read Sextus anachronistically as making a dogmatic statement about knowledge and justification akin to modern epistemological skepticism; this leads him to make the claim that Sextus's skeptical "position" is self-contradictory. Third, Priest fails to understand the Pyrrhonian use of language, which causes him to posit that

Sextus is trying to avoid self-contradiction by stating that he is not stating anything, thereby creating another contradiction. Far from trying to *avoid* contradiction, Sextus's whole method revolves around arguing that his opponents' positions can be contradicted by opposing and equally plausible positions. This is a therapeutic use of language.

17. Priest describes his application of the Inclosure Schema to Russell's Paradox more formally than I have (Priest 2002, 130). The Inclosure Schema fits the Liar Paradox as follows: Ω is the set of true sentences, φ (y) is "y is true," ψ(x) is "x is definable" (which shows that the sentence exists) and the function δ (x) is "α, where $\alpha = < \alpha \notin x >$" or in other words, claiming that the sentence being uttered is not part of the definable set of true sentences, that is, saying "I am lying." Then this sentence both is and is not a member of the set of true sentences (Priest 2002, 144–146).

18. Quotations in this section are taken from the version of the article that appears as Chapter 5 of Garfield (2002, but the article also appears as Chapter 16 of Priest (2002).

19. I think the alleged paradox of expression can be solved by appealing to *prasajya* as opposed to *paryudāsa* negation (I discussed this distinction in chapters 2 and 3). On this interpretation, Nāgārjuna's negation that he has a thesis, for example, is a *prasajya* negation or as Matilal puts it, "commitmentless denial" or "illocutionary negation" (Matilal 1986, 65–67). Garfield and Priest disagree with this sort of interpretation (Garfield and Priest 2002, 97).

20. *evaṃ dvitvasaṅkhyāvyavahārānupapattiḥ*. TUS 3.3a.

21. For more on how this argument, along with a similar argument from Candrakīrti, presents a deep challenge to the epistemology of Dignāga, see Mills (2015b).

22. For an explanation and critique of new mysterianism, see Kriegel (2003), and for a response to Kriegel, see Demircioglu (2016).

23. Broader versions of cognitive closure are endorsed by Chomsky (2016) and McGinn (1993).

24. I thank Kelly Becker for this term for Williamson's argument.

25. Although I disagree with much of what Rorty says in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, especially when it comes to his diagnosis of external-world skepticism, I've always identified with the way he begins his preface: "Almost as soon as I began to study philosophy, I was impressed by the way in which philosophical problems appeared, disappeared, or changed shape, as a result of new assumptions or vocabularies" (Rorty 1979, *xiii*).

26. For an interesting account of philosophical progress, see Goldstein (2014).

27. There are even some reasonable objections to basic logical principles: the principle of non-contradiction has been denied by dialetheists like Priest and the equivalence of "p" and "~~p" is denied in intuitionist logic.

28. A similar notion is suggested by the more educated (*suśikṣitatara*) Cārvāka Purandara. According to Pradeep Gokhale, Purandara accepts inference *(anumāna*) as a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in the "instrumental sense," according to which "*pramāṇa* need not necessarily yield true cognition. What is a means of true cognition may also function occasionally as a means of false cognition" (Gokhale 1993, 675). If Gokhale is right, then *anumāna* would constitute a sort of probable knowledge. The two proposals for separating genuine from false inference, that it is in principle empirically verifiable or that it fits with a worldly way (*laukika mārga*), both rely on inference of some kind. If even genuine inference is instrumental, then we can never be entirely sure that a particular use of inference

is in the class of genuine inferences the way we can be with perception (*pratyakṣa*), which is a *pramāṇa* in the authoritative sense. Hence, Purandara's epistemology ought to be fallibilistic. See also Gokhale (2015).

29. For a very different argument against Williams's contention that skeptical contexts are unnatural, see Rudd (2008).

30. While many proponents of various kinds of pragmatism, anti-realism, or anti-foundationalism would probably deny that they are after deep knowledge, their arguments for such theories betray this denial, since the knowledge that deep knowledge is impossible would itself be a kind of deep knowledge.

31. Hume claims that Pyrrhonists should admit, "all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease and men would remain in a total lethargy until the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence" (Hume *Enquiry*: Section 12, Part 2). Hume can perhaps be excused assuming his knowledge of Sextus wasn't entirely accurate, but Sextus is pretty clear that he's describing a way of life in which skeptics follow appearances non-dogmatically (PH 1.13–23).

32. "In this work of mine I have purposively introduced certain hard knots; my purpose in so doing being that the wicked and ignorant, thinking themselves to be clever, may not, through sheer audacity, read the book and dabble in its reasonings;— and that, on the other hand, the gentle reader, who has with due devotion, attended upon his Preceptor, and has (through his help) got the knots made easy for himself, may obtain the experience of joy arising from swimming among the waves of the essence of Reasoning and Argumentation" (Trans. Jha 1986, 705).

33. For an anthology on contemporary epistemology of disagreement, see Feldman and Warfield (2010). While this work is extremely interesting, I find it odd that little of this contemporary work seems to reflect an awareness that ancient philosophers from Zhuangzi to Sextus had a lot to say about epistemological issues surrounding disagreement as well.

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